


# YOU'RE HERE, YOU'RE QUEER, AND YOU NEED A JOB:

Mapping Your First Steps as an LGBTQ+ Gen Zer at Work

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**NAVIGATING GETTING YOUR FIRST JOB AND THRIVING AT WORK IS HARD FOR ANYONE. DOING IT AS A YOUNG, QUEER PERSON BRINGS ABOUT UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE. THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- How do you know if an organization is inclusive?
- Can you be out at work?
- Should you showcase LGBTQ+-related experiences in your resume?
- What do you do when someone isn't behaving inclusively?
- How do you find other LGBTQ+ people and allies?

Figuring out how to answer these questions can feel daunting.

**THE GOOD NEWS? IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE.**

In fact, beginning your career as an out Queer person can help you learn about your workplace and about yourself!

In this toolkit, you'll find:

- tips and strategies for understanding the professional world you're entering
- ways to find organizations that are more likely to be supportive of you
- help in navigating your workplace entry and charting your workplace success

Looking for more help with how to bring your whole, authentic self to work and thrive?

- Check out the resources, learning opportunities, and events at [outandequal.org](https://outandequal.org).

\*In this publication, you'll see a few key terms. LGBTQ+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other Queer identities. Queer is used as a term inclusive of both sexual orientation and gender identity.

# WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE?

## Queer Workplace 101



The progress of workplace inclusion for LGBTQ+ people has been huge—in the past 20 years, LGBTQ+ inclusion has moved from a recognizable feature of just a few proactively inclusive workplaces, to a commonplace in mainstream business, as well as a rising expectation of more and more workers.

For example, the first-ever Corporate Equality Index, a benchmarking report on LGBTQ+ inclusion in corporate America, was released by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation in 2002, with only 13 companies earning a perfect score. [In 2022, that number jumped to 842 organizations scoring 100 percent.](#)

**AND AMONG THE MOST INFLUENTIAL BUSINESSES IN THE WORLD, THE NUMBERS ARE EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE:** There is even more

**93%**

include sexual orientation protections

**91%**

include gender identity protections  
(with more than 68% extending protections globally)

**67%**

offer trans-inclusive health coverage

progress. For the eighth year in a row, the World Economic Forum’s agenda included LGBTQ+ issues. The presence of LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) is the norm. Philanthropic support for LGBTQ+ organizations has become a feature of much corporate giving. And more companies are getting involved in advocacy efforts. For example, more than 500 major US companies joined the Business Coalition for the Equality Act—legislation that would create federal protections for Queer and trans people in all aspects of their lives.

**IN OTHER WORDS, FOR QUEER EMPLOYEES, THE WORKPLACE IS—IN MANY CASES—MORE INCLUSIVE THAN EVER BEFORE.**

This doesn’t mean that there aren’t real challenges faced by LGBTQ+ employees that you will likely also need to navigate. In 2023, the United States has seen a historic number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced—at the state level, and it doesn’t appear that these efforts will slow down anytime soon. Increased levels of political polarization have left many Queer—and particularly trans—people feeling like outsiders in their communities and organizations.

While you can’t (well, not quite yet) turn these trends around on your own, the great news is that as you enter the workforce as an LGBTQ+ person, there are ways for you to bring your whole self into the workplace and start changing the world from where you work.

## COURT CASES AND LEGISLATION YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF

Knowing which court cases got us to where we are today helps us understand how change has happened and what still needs to be accomplished. Here are some of the most important U.S. court cases often referenced in workplace inclusion efforts:

### **Same-Sex Relations Decriminalized**

- *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003)

### **Hate Crimes Protections**

- Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Protection Act (2009)

### **Open Military Service**

- Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act (2010)

### **Marriage Equality**

- *United States v. Windsor* (2013)
- *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015)

### **Employment Non-Discrimination/Title VII Protections**

- *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2019)

# HOW DO YOU STEP INTO THE RIGHT PLACE?

Finding the Organization for You





It's a big world out there, and determining which organizations are supportive of Queer employees and which may have some work to do can be complicated. Here are a few ways to assess potential employers and their commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion.

## START HERE: THE BASICS

Looking for a job? Do your homework when it comes to employers to determine if they have taken concrete steps and enacted inclusive policies, benefits, and practices supportive of the LGBTQ+ community.

### Look here! Signs of inclusion (and hope)

- Participation and high score in Human Rights Campaign's [Corporate Equality Index](#)
- Participation and high score in disability: IN's [Disability Equality Index](#)
- External Community Partnerships and Engagement
  - > Partnerships with organizations like Out & Equal, Out for Undergrad, PFLAG, or local LGBTQ+ community centers
- Public advocacy with active support for LGBTQ+-friendly legislation and resistance to anti-LGBTQ+ bills
- Inclusive marketing efforts (e.g., Pride Month campaigns, same-gender couples in advertisements, use of gender-inclusive language, etc.)

### Caution! More research is needed

- No participation in, or low ratings on inclusion indices
- No visible external community partnerships
- Support for organizations with a history of anti-LGBTQ+ work
- Participation in anti-LGBTQ+ legislative advocacy
- Marketing that does not include or represent members of the LGBTQ+ community

# GO A STEP FURTHER: Determining the Depth of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Commitments

Here you'll find a list of key components to an LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace culture. Grab your pen, keep score, and get ready to boost your Queer in the workplace IQ! Give the company that you're looking at one point for each of the activities below. When you're done, use our score sheet to see where the organization lands.\*

\*Want more of this? Take a look at Out & Equal's [Global Toolkit for Change: Assessing LGBTQI+ Inclusion in Your Workplace](#) for a more in-depth personal assessment of organizational culture and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

- 1 The organization has an LGBTQ+ ERG.** You can often find this information on a company's website under details about their Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) efforts.
- 2 The organization has inclusive and targeted recruiting efforts.** Organizations seeking to develop a diverse workforce often look for talent at LGBTQ+-focused student events and online spaces, are open about their inclusion policies, and/or support LGBTQ+ student-focused programs.
- 3 The organization gives LGBTQ+ employees an opportunity to self-identify through surveys or HR files.** "Self-ID" is the practice of collecting data from employees who volunteer to share information about their identities and background. This data helps organizations develop better programs, policies, and support for a diverse workforce.
- 4 The organization hosts LGBTQ+ inclusion and educational trainings.** In some cases, this may be offered in addition to core DEIB learning for employees, and in other cases, it is incorporated into DEIB content.
- 5 The organization sponsors a DEIB-focused mentorship program.** Many companies have formal mentorship programs that allow people with different identities (and sometimes similar ones!) to learn from each other and build competencies in navigating the workplace.

## SCORING:

### 0-1 POINTS

**RED FLAG! Significant room for improvement**

More work is needed to guarantee a safe workplace for LGBTQ+ employees.

### 2-3 POINTS

**YELLOW FLAG! Groundwork is there, and there's room to grow**

Things are on the right track with space to get better. Basic practices may be in place but more is needed to foster a healthy culture of belonging.

### 5 POINTS

**GREEN FLAG! Inclusion is on track**

The organization has many of the tools in place to foster a workplace culture where all LGBTQ+ people belong and thrive.



## HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Sometimes getting answers to questions about an organization's culture and inclusion efforts requires a conversation. At a recruiting event or doing a preliminary interview, and find that you've hit the point where you're asked, "Do you have any questions?" Here are a few things to consider asking to get the info you need.

- Tell me about the company's DEIB efforts—what role does LGBTQ+ inclusion play in them?
- Is it common for people to add their pronouns to email signatures or to share them at the start of calls?
- What kind of LGBTQ+ inclusive benefits does the organization provide?
- Does the company have a self-ID program? Does it include options for LGBTQ+ self-identification?

**YOU'RE HERE, YOU'RE  
QUEER! NOW WHAT?**

HELLO

MY PRONOUNS ARE



You've gotten the job—congratulations! While no two paths are the same, there tend to be a few common strategies that can help you learn more about your new space, find allies to help you on this journey, and identify leaders in the organization who might provide you with select and/or ongoing professional development.

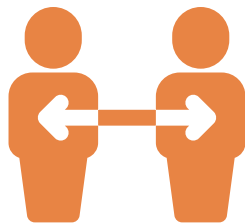
## BRINGING YOUR WHOLE SELF TO WORK...LITERALLY

Learning workplace behavioral norms can be challenging, but add in a hybrid environment, plus different generational expectations for office interactions, and it can be especially difficult. Here are a few tips for success, regardless of your current working format. If you're in a hybrid working situation, blend the answers from both lists to fit your unique situation.

## MAKE NEW CONNECTIONS

### In Person:

Say hello to people in common spaces (break room, hallways, elevators). If they're new to you, pause to introduce yourself. "Hi, just wanted to introduce myself. I'm [name, pronouns], and I'm new to the [insert team, project, or function name]."



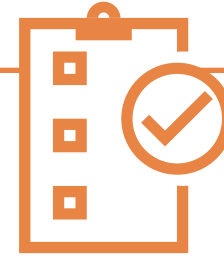
### Virtual:

Reach out to new colleagues via your internal messaging system or email, introduce yourself, and ask if they have 15-30 minutes to spare for an introductory call. Come prepared with basic questions for them, like:

- How was your weekend?
- Can you tell me more about your job function?
- How long have you been with [organization name]? What's something you wish you knew in your first 30 days?
- What's the best way to communicate with you? Email? Messaging? Text? Calls?

Before wrapping up, ask if they foresee working closely on any upcoming projects. Regardless of the answer, offer to keep in touch.

## CONFIRM RECEIPT OR COMPREHENSION OF A PROJECT/ASSIGNMENT



### **In Person:**

Whether getting feedback on your work or being handed an assignment, provide verbal or visual confirmation when possible (nodding, thumbs up, etc., paired with a “got it,” or other affirmation).

Then, shortly after the interaction is over, offer a repeat-back, ideally via email: “Got it. I’ll create the [project/assignment] for you by end of day tomorrow, with [parameters] taken into consideration.”

### **Virtual:**

#### **If via voice/video call:**

Provide a verbal confirmation and if it is multi-step, or has a specific deadline, immediately repeat back the ask. “Sure, I’ll make sure to get you that report by [deadline].”

After the meeting, follow up in writing with another repeat back of the request(s).

#### **If via instant message:**

Provide a written confirmation, e.g., “On it,” to start out. Then check in with your manager to see if an emoji reaction (e.g., a “thumbs up” sign) will work for them in lieu of a more formal confirmation.

#### **If via email:**

Match the tone of the ask email—if it’s one sentence with no formal introduction or closing, you can do the same. If it’s more formal, or has any third parties CC’d, err on the side of formality in your response: “Hi [Name]...”

## FIGURE OUT WHAT TO WEAR



### **In Person:**

If it's your first time with your colleagues in person, err on the side of formality. Regardless, prior to the day, check in with your point of contact (HR, manager, peer). Rather than asking "What should I wear?" which implies a complete lack of knowledge, frame it around wanting to hit the right tone: "I'm excited to see everyone for our retreat tomorrow and want to make a good first impression. I was planning on wearing (insert items). Does that seem appropriate for the event?"

### **Virtual:**

Generally, virtual workplaces have retained a more-casual vibe, compared to office settings. Still, it's important to look professional. Leave clothing that's wrinkly and/or ripped for the weekend. If you'll be doing a lot of video meetings, be aware that some patterns (e.g., stripes) may read poorly on camera and be distracting. As you get to know your colleagues, read the room as to what seems like the standard for people in day-to-day work.

# EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS: Not Just for Socializing Anymore

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)—sometimes called Business Resource Groups (BRGs) or Affinity Groups—have been around for decades. In fact, the first ERGs date back to the 1960s when employees at some major companies saw the need for a gathering and networking space for Black employees navigating racial tensions in and outside of the workplace. Since that time, ERGs have grown to respond to the changing workforce. Today you'll often find ERGs focusing on race/ethnicity, gender, dis/ability, neurodiversity, military service, parenting, caregiving, generations, and, of course LGBTQ+ identities.

When you're new to a workplace, ERGs can be a great place to start meeting people with similar experiences who are able to help you learn how to navigate your new work world. And for LGBTQ+ and ally employees, this can include guidance on organizational norms, such as, where to find support, how to build your network, and help when you just need to connect with someone who simply understands your community.

- An important reminder: Nobody has just one identity, and getting engaged in multiple ERGs can help you find support for all of the different things that make you you.
- For example, a new hire who is both Latina and bi+ could find support in both LGBTQ+ and Latin ERGs. Or an employee who is both nonbinary and neurodivergent may find different kinds of guidance in both the LGBTQ+ ERG and one created for neurodiversity.

## **GAME-CHANGER TIP: YOU CAN INFLUENCE ERGS, TOO**

We often think of ERGs as places where people can get support from those like them. But consider this: Your participation in different ERGs can actually help influence what members know, the issues they focus on, and the programs they offer. This is intersectionality in action. Maybe the dis/ability ERG hasn't yet done a deep dive into the intersections of sexual orientation/gender identity and dis/ability. Your involvement may just be the thing to change that!

# FIND A FRIEND:

## Allies and Advancement

Now it's time to find your allies. Why? Allies will be your go-to for support, resources, and even mentorship. They can be colleagues, managers, or even leaders with whom you interact enough to form a strong working relationship.

An ally can be as simple as someone willing to listen, learn, and support you in your personal and professional journey through everything from sharing pronouns at the start of meetings to helping you navigate the workplace. These allies can be found by simply getting to know the people around you—from peers to more senior colleagues.

So how do you figure out who your allies are? As you get to know the people around you, how things work, and where you'd like to take your career, start thinking about who might be able to help along the way. Consider lots of different ways that you'd like to develop. Do you want to build your how to be Queer in the workplace IQ? Are you focusing on developing skills in a certain area? Are you interested in possibly diversifying your knowledge base? Allies can help in all of these areas.

Take a moment and list out the peers, manager(s), and/or leader(s) whose allyship you could cultivate towards those goals. On the left side, write their name and organizational relationship to you. Then list out what skills/attributes they have and how they might support you as an ally.

Use this map to keep you on track as you build these relationships. Come back to your list and update it from time to time so you can see the work you've done and how it has evolved as you've become stronger in your role.

- One last thing: Remember that great allyship is always a two-way street, so invest time in getting to know your colleagues so you can understand where and how you might be able to help them, too.
- This relationship can start with a simple icebreaker, like asking about their weekend or where the best coffee spot is.

### ALLY MAP

Name	Skills
Maria	AMAZING Networker
Ron	Data Analysis genius
Case	Also nonbinary - seems to know how to navigate the office
Elise	So good at conflict resolution + mediation

# MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP:

## Expanding Your Workplace IQ

Everyone can use a guide to get through challenges in the same way that everyone can use a cheerleader once in a while. And this is where mentorship and sponsorship come in.

### FIRST, SOME DEFINITIONS...

**Mentors:** People with experience in the workplace who will provide you with professional guidance and support. Think of this person as the expert tour guide who can help you find ways to scale the big mountains.

**Sponsors:** These are individuals who are focused on actively working to promote your professional growth. They're there for the assist, advocating for the helicopter to pick you up and fly you to the next apex. Ready to get started on your own plan? Get to work by following these three steps:

1

### MAKE YOUR (ASPIRATIONAL) LIST

Think about people inside (and even outside) of your organization who have skills and/or expertise that you think will be helpful for your professional development. Ideally, you'll have some kind of connection to the person, but it isn't required. Select your top candidate and get to work.

**Pro Tip:** If you're focusing on a sponsor, they're usually most effective when you work for the same company.

2

### MAKE YOUR PITCH

Think about people inside (and even outside) of your organization an in-person or online conversation: "Have you ever taken on a mentee/protégé? Are you interested in doing so now? I am looking for a mentor/sponsor to help me..."

**Pro Tip:** Don't do this over text. While texting is an effective, quick way to communicate, in-person or online conversations are the best way to demonstrate professionalism and create space for meaningful discussions where you can provide details and answer questions.



# MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP:

## Expanding Your Workplace IQ

### 3

### **BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

Share your goals with your mentor or sponsor so you can devise a plan for how you'll work on your development, a schedule of when and how you'll meet, and other expectations about your new partnership.

**Pro Tip:** Be willing to listen. Often, mentors and sponsors will have a perspective on your work and development that isn't immediately visible to you. By listening to some of their suggestions and guidance, you may start building skills you didn't even know you needed. And be sure to remain committed to the process. Remember, Mentors and Sponsors have lots to gain by engaging in a protégé relationship, including their own visibility and reputation as an inclusive business leader. They often have something (sometimes a lot) riding on a protégé's performance. Failing to contribute or meet Mentor/Sponsor expectations is the quickest way to spoil a relationship and in turn, put a dent in one's professional reputation.

# TRANSFORM THE (WORK) WORLD: You as Changemaker



Polling consistently shows that Gen Z—similar to their Millennial predecessors—are incredibly positive about their ability to create change, [with one poll revealing 75 percent of Gen Z said they believe their generation will change the world](#). This game-changer attitude shows up in the workplace, too.

But transforming your workplace is a big project, so starting with how you bring yourself into the effort can make you feel empowered and ready for more significant work. Here are three great ways to start:

### **MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION**

Introductions can be hard—you're put on the spot, and for those who are LGBTQ+, the pressure to conform can be heavy. For some, it is a daily deluge of decisions, wondering about things like when to code switch, perceptions about gender expression, and how to handle pronouns or chosen names. But making a good first impression and staying true to who we are is possible. If conforming to traditionally "professional" language or syntax feels unnatural, that's OK.

- For example, rather than saying, "Hello. My name is Asya, and I am new to the Jr. Sales Associate role," you could say, "Hey y'all, I'm Asya, I use she/her pronouns and am your new Jr. Sales Associate."
- Look at that, you game-changer. In one sentence, you let people know who you are, modeled pronoun use, and taught an inclusive term.

## **PRONOUN OR NO PRONOUN?**

You should *always* feel able to share your pronouns with your name if you want to, regardless of whether others do the same. Just know that you may get some mixed reactions, from people who immediately share theirs, to those who may be less welcoming, to those who have questions.

If people ask questions, it's perfectly OK to say, "I'm happy to answer your questions later," or use a simple response like, "I like to share my pronouns to make sure others can refer to me with respect and invite their sharing, too."

Most people asking questions will be brand new to the idea of using pronouns for inclusion, so granting them some latitude with imperfectly-phrased questions is a great way to make a connection. If their questions become too many or too invasive, refer them to your ERG or to a resource like Out & Equal's ["What's Your Pronoun?" guide](#).



## KNOW HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

Being out at work as a Queer person often means that people will have questions about your identity or see you as a resource for all their LGBTQ+ questions.

One of the most powerful ways to include and educate others is through sharing our personal stories. For example, sharing your story about why you choose to be out at work can make people understand things that they never have before. For some, your story may just be the starting point of their allyship. There's a lot we can say about our experiences, so here are a few things to keep in mind while you're sharing your story:

**How are you feeling?** In other words, do you feel safe (both psychologically and physically) to share the story? If not, then there may be a better time to share.

**Who's your audience?** Think about what the person (or people) you're talking to are likely to know about your identity and what you might need to explain. Also, think about what role people have and how you might make your story relevant to them. For example, if speaking with someone in management, helping them understand that out employees tend to perform better than those who are less comfortable being out can make your story show them what their stake in the game is.

**What's your strategy?** Storytelling is about creating impact. When building the story, be sure to know what your goal of sharing is, what outcome you'd like to see, and the important parts you should include. Then practice making it concise. Keeping your story under five minutes means you'll get listener engagement and response.





## DISAGREE WITH KINDNESS (AND STYLE)

We're often socialized to fear conflict and worry about the outcome. But here's some good news: Often, successful disagreement can strengthen (and not harm) our relationships. Sometimes you'll even find that you learn a lot about yourself and start seeing different perspectives you haven't considered when you disagree with someone. But, like most things, it takes skill and practice. Here's how to start.

**Be strategic.** You've heard it before and we'll say it again: Little good gets done when you approach conflict expecting a negative experience. No matter how smooth you think you are, don't skip this step! Consider what the best (and worst) case scenarios can be if you push back. If you feel like something good can be gained (as opposed to just arguing) then move forward.

**Figure out your WIIFM\* —and theirs.** Establish connection through a shared goal. Figure out what they need, and determine if there is any overlap with your goals. Use this overlap to create a win-win scenario. For example, you might want people to share pronouns during sales introductions, while a manager thinks it might be risky. You probably both share the goal of getting and keeping clients, as well as making everyone feel welcome. Elevate that as the way to find solutions.

**Stay respectful and practice kindness.** Set a respectful time and place for your conversation. (Don't do it in the middle of a meeting!) Lead with questions like, "May I provide some feedback about what happened?" or "I was wondering if we could talk out our positions on things..." Make your case concisely and with specific examples. No matter what, it's your job to stay level and professional. Inadvertently escalating the situation by yelling, pointing fingers, or being rude will end in failure. This is a good time to practice deep breathing, grounding yourself firmly, and even injecting a smile or friendly comment here or there to diffuse the situation. These will calm you and them down!

\*What's a WIIFM? That's shorthand for What's In It For Me. In other words, what are you getting from an experience or an investment of your time? When people see their WIIFM, they're more likely to engage.

# CLIMBING THE BIG ROCKS:

## Power Mapping for Success

Sometimes your efforts to create change will take more than one conversation and require strategic thinking to meet a goal. When you're new at an organization, this can sometimes feel intimidating and overwhelming, but sketching out a "power map" is a quick, visual way to figure out who the key players are, who your allies might be, and preemptively problem-solve should you hit any roadblocks along the way.

Power maps should include four key elements. Group people by level of power to address the issue and by how supportive (or not) they are:

**What's your goal?** Be very specific and clear. "I want my workplace to be inclusive of people like me" is too big to have an accessible action plan. But "I want to make people feel more comfortable sharing pronouns in meetings" is a specific action that can lead to bigger things. Set goals that you can achieve.

**Who is your primary decision-maker?** Who holds the power to help you achieve the goal? Identify this person and then start thinking about to best make your case. Don't forget to include the WIIFM for that person.

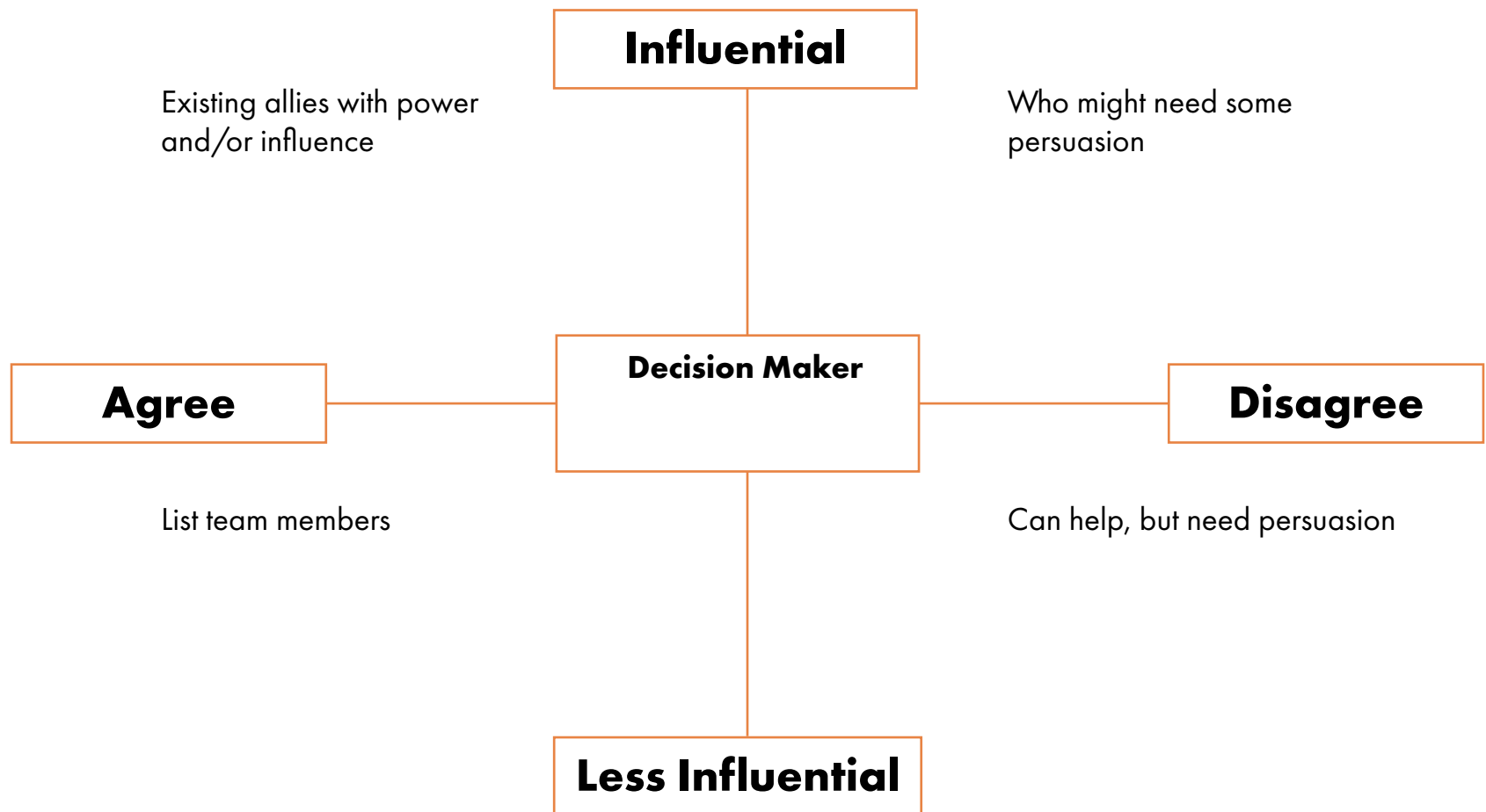
**Who are your existing allies with power and/or influence?** Who is already in your corner? Think about how they might be able to help. Talk to them about what you'd like to do and get their feedback and support. They may also use their own platforms and stories to help with your effort by providing diverse perspectives.

**Who are other people that can help?** Perhaps you didn't make progress with your first contact, so who else might be worth speaking with? Sometimes your primary contact may ask you to bring others in. The good news is you've already mapped who they may be. They may have less influence than existing allies, but don't count them out!

**Who might need some persuasion?** While you've got a great goal, not everyone will—at least not at first. Consider who might be resistant and think about how to educate and engage them or have someone else from your supportive network provide an assist.

# POWER MAP


**GOAL:** \_\_\_\_\_



# WHAT'S NEXT?







There's no one path to being a successful Queer professional. Things will look different for every person, because how you navigate the world you're entering is as diverse as the generation itself. Gen Z is entering a workplace that has benefitted from the efforts of previous Queer generations. While it isn't a workplace without challenges, you're officially part of it. And that's why this is exciting!

Use the tools here to help guide your way as you get started. Continue to connect with other out Queer professionals in your organization (and others) to learn how to leverage intergenerational power and influence so that you can take on the next round of transforming what inclusion means.

This is the end of a resource, but just the beginning of the conversation. Keep up to date with more learning from Out & Equal by visiting [outandequal.org](https://outandequal.org) and following us on social media.

**Now get out there and change your workplace. We're cheering for you!**