

FLIP *the* script

TRANSGENDER¹ IN THE WORKPLACE

Words reflect workplace culture. Even with the best intentions, our words can reinforce negative stereotypes around gender identity. Be mindful that our words matter. Communicate in ways that ensure people know they are valued, feel safe to be their authentic selves at work, and have a sense of belonging as trusted, contributing members of their teams.

DISHONORING ←

→ HONORING

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"ARE YOU A SHEMALE?"

HOW IT'S DISHONORING
Terms such as "shemale" are derogatory and insinuate that the person's gender and sex do not match, making them necessarily something "other." This can be insulting and mentally exhausting to transgender individuals.²

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"I want to learn, but I'm aware I may ask a seemingly insensitive question. Would you be willing to discuss your experience with me and give me feedback if I misstep or use language I should be avoiding?"

Be accountable for your own learning process, be honest about your potential areas of growth, and be respectful of their boundaries.

INSENSITIVE ←

→ SENSITIVE

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"USING THE SINGULAR GENDER PRONOUN 'THEY' IS NOT GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT."

HOW IT'S INSENSITIVE
This shows a lack of willingness to honor and respect transgender people by placing normative language (he/she) as a priority over inclusive terms (they/them).³

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"What are your pronouns? How would you like me to refer to you?"

Using appropriately gendered terminology to refer to transgender individuals honors and respects their authenticity and demonstrates a degree of acceptance and allyship that can serve as an important signal of inclusion.

NOT CONFIDENTIAL ←

→ CONFIDENTIAL

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"HE USED TO BE A MAN. NOW HE'D LIKE TO BE REFERRED TO AS SHE/HER."

HOW IT'S NOT CONFIDENTIAL
Disclosing an individual's transitional history does not respect their privacy and forces them "out of the closet." This may prevent others from seeing a transgender individual as their authentic self and/or contribute to a lack of trust and safety, even potentially putting them at risk for physical or emotional violence.⁴

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"Their pronouns are she/her."

Keeping conversations or information about someone's transgender identity private is an important way to support their ability to be true to their authentic self without spending excess emotional energy trying to undo or otherwise manage others' perceptions of them.

DISEMPOWERING ←

→ EMPOWERING

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"WHY ARE YOU BEING SO DEFENSIVE?"

HOW IT'S DISEMPOWERING
This takes no personal ownership for any harm done and turns the blame on the transgender individual, accusing them of being overly sensitive if they express their experience with transphobic micro-aggressions.⁵

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"I hear you, and it seems that this is causing you some distress. While my intention was never to cause you harm, I recognize the impact it has had on you. How can I support you and do better next time?"

Actively listen and validate the transgender person with whom you are speaking.

INVALIDATING ←

→ VALIDATING

WHAT PEOPLE SAY
"I JUST DON'T GET WHY YOU HAVE TO GO SO FAR WITH IT. AREN'T YOU JUST BUTCH OR A TOMBOY OR WHATEVER?"

HOW IT'S INVALIDATING
Comments such as these trivialize the experiences of transgender individuals and undermine the real struggles many face and the courage it may have taken them to get to where they are in their journey.⁶

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD
"While I may not completely understand your experience, I hear your challenges and I am here to support you. In time, I'd like to learn more and will make more of a concerted effort to broaden my perspective."

Being open to understanding the transgender experience and seeking out educational information is an important step in reducing misunderstanding, misinformation, and biases related to the transgender experience. With increased knowledge often comes decreased transphobia and increased empathy.

SELF-REFLECT
Assess your thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs to understand your **unconscious biases** and assumptions.

ENGAGE IN COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION
Inquire across differences with sensitivity and humility to expand your knowledge and build bridges. Avoid making assumptions rooted in stereotypes, biases, and myths.

CONTINUE TO EDUCATE YOURSELF
Learn more about issues that affect transgender individuals and how you can be an ally. Catalyst and many other organizations have resources that can support you in this process.

KEEP A GROWTH MINDSET
Remain open to different experiences and perspectives, even when they challenge you or push you outside your comfort zone. Recognize that your learning is a journey.

SOURCES:

1. Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression are different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Deena Fidas and Beck Bailey, "[Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: A Toolkit for Employers](#)," (Human Rights Campaign, 2016); Kevin L. Nadal, Chassitty N. Whitman, Lindsey S. Davis, Tanya Erazo, and Kristin C. Davidoff, "[Microaggressions Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Genderqueer People: A Review of the Literature](#)," *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 53, no. 4-5 (2016).
2. Kevin L. Nadal, Chassitty N. Whitman, Lindsey S. Davis, Tanya Erazo, and Kristin C. Davidoff, "[Microaggressions Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Genderqueer People: A Review of the Literature](#)," *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 53, no. 4-5 (2016); Mustafa Bilgehan Ozturka and Ahu Tatli, "[Gender Identity Inclusion in the Workplace: Broadening Diversity Management Research and Practice Through the Case of Transgender Employees in the UK](#)," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 27, no. 8 (2016); p. 781-802.
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4. Charlie L. Law, Larry R. Martinez, Enrica N. Ruggs, Michelle R. Hebl and Emily Akers, "[Trans-parency In the Workplace: How the Experiences of Transexual Employees Can Be Improved](#)," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 79 (2011): p. 710-723; Kevin L. Nadal, Chassitty N. Whitman, Lindsey S. Davis, Tanya Erazo, and Kristin C. Davidoff, "[Microaggressions Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Genderqueer People: A Review of the Literature](#)," *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 53, no. 4-5 (2016).
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