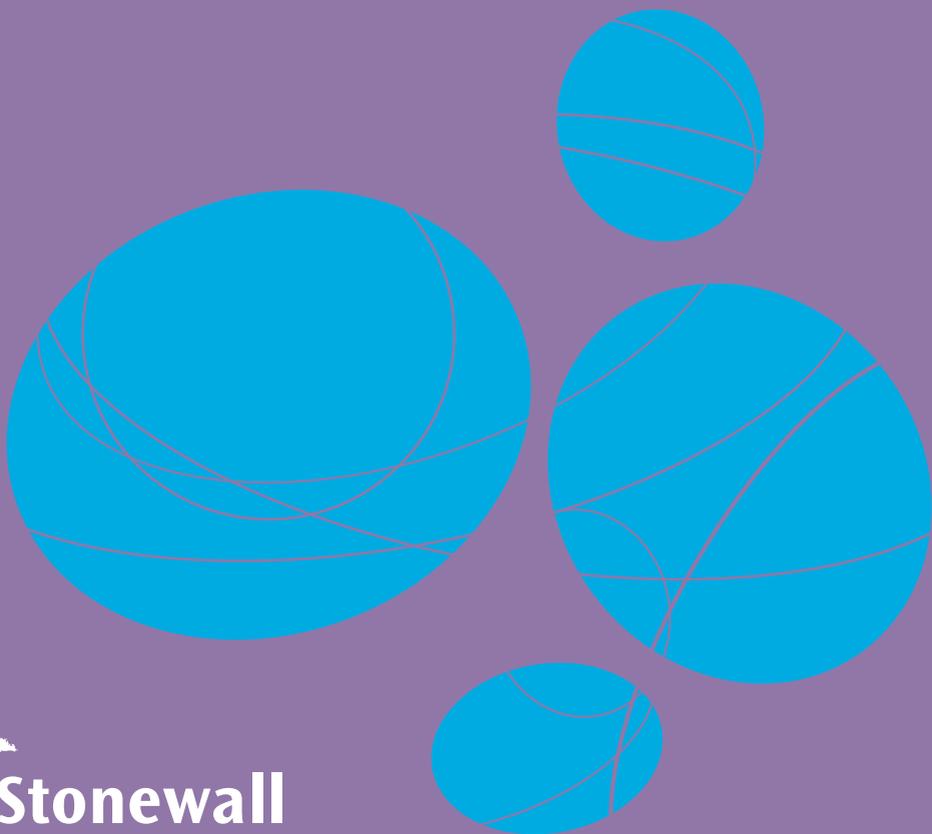


# STRAIGHT ALLIES

How they help create  
gay-friendly workplaces



**Stonewall**

WORKPLACE GUIDES



# STRAIGHT ALLIES

How they help create  
gay-friendly workplaces



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## **STRAIGHT ALLIES**

How they help create gay-friendly workplaces

### **Stonewall**

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# FOREWORD

Straight people have a critical role to play in creating gay-friendly workplaces. Stonewall Top 100 employers routinely tell us that ‘straight allies’ have been key to advancing fair treatment of their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. Their involvement – often precisely because they’re not gay themselves – can have a transformative effect on the culture of an organisation and the workplace experience of staff, both gay and straight.

It’s clear that across Britain the vast majority of employees want their workplaces to be gay-friendly. YouGov polling of over 2,000 heterosexuals, commissioned by Stonewall, found that nine in ten support legal protections against homophobic discrimination at work. Many of Stonewall’s ‘Diversity Champions’ – the 600 major employers we work with – and their heterosexual employees still tell us, however, that they’re sometimes unsure how, as straight people, they can help make this a reality.

This guide is designed to show what some of these straight allies – from the Second Sea Lord to a managing director of Goldman Sachs – do, what inspires them to do it and, most important, what other straight people can also do to make their workplaces more gay-friendly. We’re grateful to all those who shared their experiences with us. Their example clearly shows that everyone can play a role in creating workplaces where all staff, regardless of sexual orientation, can perform to the best of their ability.

**Ben Summerskill** Chief Executive, Stonewall

## Contents

	Introduction	2
<b>1</b>	Why be a straight ally	3
<b>2</b>	At the top	10
<b>3</b>	Senior managers	20
<b>4</b>	Line managers	28
<b>5</b>	Straight allies at every level	38
	Top ten tips	44

# INTRODUCTION

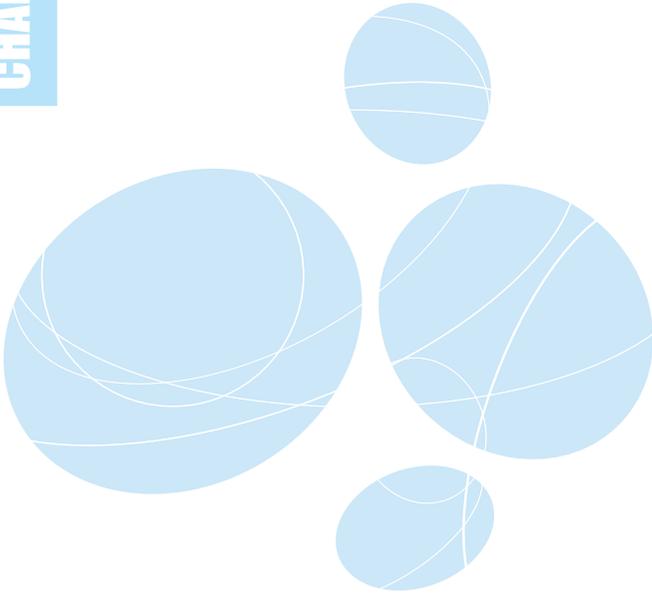
'Straight ally' is a term used to describe heterosexual people who believe that lesbian, gay and bisexual people should experience full equality in the workplace. Good straight allies recognise that gay people can perform better if they can be themselves and straight allies use their role within an organisation to create a culture where this can happen. Straight allies might be at the very top of an organisation or a colleague in a team. Either way, they recognise that it's not just the responsibility of gay people to create a workplace culture that is inclusive of everyone. The action they take can range from being a leader of an organisation that puts equality – including gay equality – at the heart of the business to being a junior member of staff who challenges homophobic banter amongst colleagues.

Stonewall interviewed straight allies from a range of sectors – most are employed by one of the 600 major employers that are part of Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme, Britain's employers' forum on sexual orientation. Each was recommended to us by colleagues who felt they had played a significant role in making their workplaces more gay-friendly. We wanted to establish what makes some heterosexual people take responsibility for this work and why they think it is important.

This good practice guide is the seventh in a series from Stonewall, Britain's lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) charity. It details the experiences, the motivations and the impact made by straight allies. Its aim is to inspire straight people at all levels within organisations to play an active role in making their workplaces more gay-friendly. The guide also shows organisations how they can engage straight people to become allies.



# CHAPTER



# WHY BE A STRAIGHT ALLY

Good employers have made significant gains in making their workplaces gay-friendly. However many employers still fail to create a workplace culture where all staff, regardless of their sexual orientation, can perform to the best of their abilities.

Research shows however that in almost every organisation the vast majority of employees want their workplaces to be gay-friendly and free of homophobia. YouGov polling of over 2,000 heterosexuals across Britain, commissioned by Stonewall, found that nine in ten support legal protections from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the workplace and three in four believe that anti-gay prejudice should be tackled. These straight people therefore play a crucial role in making the workplace more inclusive.

## Being gay in the workplace

Many lesbian, gay and bisexual people still have negative experiences because of their sexual orientation and feel unable to be out at work. Stonewall research shows that in 2011 two in five gay people still do not feel able to be out to their managers, and three in four do not feel able to be out with clients or suppliers (*Workplace Equality Index*, 2011). Research has also shown that this often has an impact on their performance at work (*Peak Performance*, 2008).

Every lesbian, gay or bisexual person has to make a conscious decision about whether they will be open about their sexual orientation at work. However, it's not simply a case of coming out once. Gay people have to decide to come out every time they meet new colleagues, clients, suppliers or stakeholders. In some instances gay people who have come out at work have been ostracised or harassed by their colleagues. Bullying and harassment of lesbian, gay and bisexual colleagues is still common, with one in seven heterosexuals in the national workforce saying they've witnessed homophobic bullying of colleagues at work (*Living Together*, 2007).

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people who do not feel able to be out at work often expend significant amounts of energy on avoiding being outed, energy that could be spent on performing more effectively in their job. Many feel they need to avoid forming close relationships with colleagues, avoiding anything that may reveal aspects of their personal life at work and telling lies about their life simply to avoid being outed.

This can have an obvious effect on performance. They feel less confident, less motivated, unable to put everything into their job and unable to use their personal experiences to develop creative solutions at work. Not being able to engage with others honestly about who they are has an effect on their relationships with colleagues, managers, clients and stakeholders. They can often be seen as untrustworthy, unfriendly or an unwilling 'team player'.

The decision to come out is made easier however if gay people believe their managers, colleagues and clients will support them. This can be clearly demonstrated by colleagues making a visible effort to make the workplace more gay-friendly.

## Why straight allies?

Everyone in an organisation has a role to play to make their workplaces more gay-friendly. However, it's clear that heterosexual people play a crucial role, particularly if they hold positions of leadership.

Mathematically, most leaders of most organisations are likely to be heterosexual – so it's absolutely essential that heterosexual people have a good understanding of why this is an important issue. *Alex Marshall, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary*

Acceptance is only possible if it's articulated by those who aren't gay. It's absolutely fundamental that the straight community are those who articulate this message. The acceptance in the Ministry of Defence that it was right that our people should be allowed to march at London Pride in uniform was driven from the top by people who were straight, not gay. *Vice Admiral Charles Montgomery CBE ADC, Second Sea Lord, Royal Navy*

Interventions made by heterosexual people can also have a greater impact. Straight allies agree that if they raise the issue then the charge of self-interest cannot be levelled and this makes their colleagues more receptive to the message.

When lesbian or gay colleagues get up and talk about LGBT issues, people hearing those issues may say 'well you would say that, wouldn't you – because you're a member of the gay community.' When straight allies say the same thing, it has a different impact. *Chris Murray, Member of the National Grid Leadership Team and CEO, Xoserve Ltd.*

It's one thing someone saying 'it's important because it affects me directly' but it's different when someone says 'I can see how this is affecting someone else and it's something that we all need to sort out.' It can make the message stronger.

*Louise Bailey, Permitting Officer, Environment Agency*

It gives it greater credence by the fact that it's not because of a vested interest. If straight people can add their voice I do think it's capable of making people realise that it has very strong merits. *Chris Hamilton, Chairman, Oldham Rugby League Football Club*

Their gay colleagues agree.

Straight allies, particularly at senior levels, are fundamental to making gay equality work because if you're seen to be the gay member of staff who's running around doing it on your own then people think 'all the work you're doing is self-serving, you're only helping yourself, you're helping a small group.' So I think there's a huge role for straight allies because they lend credibility, they help unlock resources, they get buy-in internally and they impress people externally. If you don't have the support of straight allies then people will always ask 'why are you doing this? Isn't this favouritism? Why are you just catering to a certain group?'

*Daniel Winterfeldt, Head of International Capital Markets, CMS  
Cameron McKenna LLP*

Straight allies agree that the burden of responsibility shouldn't rest solely on gay colleagues' shoulders.

The biggest danger when you're looking for leadership is to find your most senior, open gay person and say 'because you're openly gay, and you're senior, you're now going to be the champion of LGB issues.' Why should that person be the champion of LGB issues just because they're openly gay? That's a real imposition. *Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor, Salford University*

Our most senior out gay member of staff said 'I don't want to be the person who always has to champion sexual orientation issues – I want to focus on the job I do'.

*Lucy Malarkey, Head of Neighbourhoods, Gentoo Sunderland*

## Everyone can do it

Championing workplace equality for gay people doesn't require special skills or attributes. Straight allies agree that the skills they use to advocate gay equality are the same skills they use every day in their jobs.

I don't think you need any special skills above and beyond what you already need to be a good leader – it's just part of being a good people developer.

*Gareth Hall, Senior Manager, Accenture*

I don't think I've got special skills. But the fact that you try is received well, and as long as you do something with a good heart nobody's going to respond negatively. You've just got to want to make a difference and be willing to try.

*Nicholas Crapp, Managing Director, Goldman Sachs*

Many feel it is important to always remember why they are straight allies – for most it is because of a belief that everyone should treat others how they would wish to be treated themselves. This strong foundation gives them confidence.

I believe that everybody should be treated how you want to be treated yourself – it doesn't matter whether you're lesbian, gay or bisexual. *Louise Goldsmith, Leader, West Sussex County Council*

People are terrified of saying the wrong thing and they therefore probably tread too gently around issues they should be more robust about. This is a people issue – it's about how you treat people and I think you need to be confident that if you treat someone as a human being they'll respond to you as a human being. *Mike Eland, Director General, HM Revenue and Customs*



The explicit reason why I champion lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues at Salford is precisely because I'm straight. And that's a very important message, because if a heterosexual person says 'I'm leading on this issue because I believe it affects everybody' then that has a real impact.

*Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor, Salford University*

## What can organisations do?

Some organisations have developed formal straight ally programmes to encourage and support more straight people to become allies. Some do this by having a 'friends', 'allies' or 'supporters' network to allow straight allies to support the work of the LGBT staff network. Others have introduced reverse mentoring schemes to allow managers to get to know gay colleagues and learn about their experiences in the workplace.

One example is the MD Ally programme at Goldman Sachs. The programme allows managing directors within the firm to engage with their gay colleagues.

The MD Ally programme is about getting the broadest, most representative group of senior people involved in LGBT issues, acting as informed advocates, sitting in senior positions in all the divisions. The leveraging effect of that is significant, because you've got a lot of people talking about the issues, using the words and talking to other colleagues. And people look upwards to see what their managers are doing. They see what they're saying. They see that they're proud to be associated with the programme. They see what actions they're taking. *Glenn Earle, Chief Operating Officer of European Businesses, Goldman Sachs*

Leaders at the top of organisations have different motivations for being straight allies and advocating gay equality in their workplace. Many believe it's the right thing to do and that to be an authentic leader they need to live their personal values at work.

We live in a society where people are still kicked to death in the streets for being gay. The reality is that hate crime and discrimination exist. Turning a blind eye would be wrong because those disadvantages exist and they are particular to lesbian, gay and bisexual colleagues. They're also particular to all our LGB customers. So I wouldn't sleep easily if I was only being held to account on the routine things, numbers and quantitative issues. This is qualitative. It's about how people feel.

*Bill Payne, Chief Executive, Metropolitan Housing Partnership*

I have a burning drive to ensure fairness. I think that commitment to fairness and to the protection of the people that we serve has always been a big driver for me.

*Alex Marshall, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary*

For people who oppose LGBT equality, let them look at the evidence of homophobic bullying in schools and universities. Where people are bullied to the point potentially of suicide because of their sexual orientation, this is hardly something that should be ignored from the point of view of equality.

*Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor, Salford University*

Many leaders have had experiences at work which have motivated them to be straight allies. Many also believe that playing a role in changing some of the experiences their gay colleagues have at work is incredibly rewarding.

In a previous job, at a rather macho organisation, I was asked to take on a member of staff who was very bright but not doing very well. She was gay and I learnt a lot from her about how she felt in the workplace and how comments that were made really affected her performance. I was very struck by that and through supporting her and getting her integrated into the team I learnt a lot about what she had to deal with.

*Louise Goldsmith, Leader, West Sussex County Council*

If you start with quotas and targets you're missing the point. You need to sit down and listen to people's stories. For example, a colleague described to me this journey from being a person who was much more on edge to just being so much more relaxed about herself. She said that because of the network of support here, the culture and the way we work as an organisation, she's been able to drop a 'challenging' image. It's a privilege to have been involved in an organisation that helps someone go through that. If you get the opportunity to help improve just one person's life it's for the good. But we get a chance to do it every day.

*Bill Payne, Chief Executive, Metropolitan Housing Partnership*

Those running organisations also believe that they have a responsibility, as a leader, to be a straight ally. Some straight allies believe that people in a position of leadership have a responsibility to make best use of that position.

I think senior people have a critical role in setting the tone because people look to the leadership to understand what's important to the organisation. They look at what leaders say and do. And here at Goldman Sachs the championing of diversity comes from the very top and that's why people see that it's very important to us.

*Glenn Earle, Chief Operating Officer of European Businesses,  
Goldman Sachs*



You've got to have an organisation that's supportive and have senior people explicitly saying it too. That's so important because if you know that the top of the organisation agrees, then you feel so much more confident to say things at the bottom, which is often where it's taking place. So I think there's definitely a role for further leadership right from the top.

*Corey Dixon, Associate, The Parthenon Group*

If you're not pressing down on the problem then you're not making the most of what power you've got as a CEO. It's my job as a leader to stand up and say 'this matters – here is a sizeable minority of our workforce who're entitled just like the rest of us to be treated with respect and should have the confidence to be who they are in the workplace'. It's not about policies and procedures. It's what you say and how you behave.

*Bill Payne, Chief Executive, Metropolitan Housing Partnership*

I personally lead on fairness and equality for the whole organisation. I don't do that with burglary or murder enquiries for example. I feel strongly that I need to symbolically lead on this because it's my job to set the direction for the organisation. I've made it clear that it's up there with all the really important things we do – it's fundamental to our business.

*Alex Marshall, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary*

Colleagues take direct cues from how leaders behave and they are therefore central in setting the tone of their organisation. To many straight allies this means needing to demonstrate through personal actions that gay equality is important.

I supported Gay Pride in August which was great. I joined the staff on our stand and I found it quite emotional because I was struck by the staff who said 'oh it's so fantastic you've come'. I wanted to send a clear message that 'I'm coming out to show my support'. Since the event I've put it in my blog and I've talked a lot about why I attended because I think those messages do permeate through. It's a really important way to show my commitment and to demonstrate how I believe the organisation should be. *Louise Goldsmith, Leader, West Sussex County Council*



## Make your support for gay equality public in publications, on your website or on your intranet

The unique position that leaders of organisations have means they have the power to create a platform for others, particularly gay employees, to be heard throughout the organisation.

Leadership is about giving people opportunity. I can't speak on behalf of women, gay people and lesbians in the organisation. What I can do though is make sure that they speak for themselves and that their voice is heard. The objective is mine, however, which is a fairer and better environment and culture, but the message isn't simply mine alone.

*Bill Payne, Chief Executive, Metropolitan Housing Partnership*

Straight allies running organisations know that they need to draw on talent from all sections of the population and therefore must create workplaces where everyone can be themselves. These leaders also understand that when inclusive conditions don't exist, the productivity of their staff is directly affected.

I want the best people from across society; I don't want anybody excluded because they don't look right, or because their sexual orientation is an issue.

*Alex Marshall, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary*

If somebody is gay and wants come out but doesn't feel comfortable doing so, that says something about how they feel about the organisation they work in. It implies that they're not going to bring their whole persona into the workplace and into their engagement with colleagues. That isn't a good thing for the individual. And it isn't a good thing for the organisation. *Glenn Earle, Chief Operating Officer of European Businesses, Goldman Sachs*

*Glenn Earle, Chief Operating Officer of European Businesses, Goldman Sachs*

At a time of financial difficulty business leaders are aware that their organisations need to be at their most effective. While there is often little cost involved in taking action to promote equality, the benefits can be significant.

At a time when universities are under pressure we need to find the very best talent, and to do that we've got to remove stigma and prejudice, because otherwise we're losing out on the opportunity to find great people. The same goes for students. In a situation where we're under financial threat, equalities become even more important for survival.

*Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor, Salford University*

Top leaders believe that one of their key roles as a straight ally is to communicate why gay equality is important in their workplace and to pass on a clear and simple message.

I'm known as a passionate person so people realise that I do it because I believe in it and that enables them to buy into it. You've got to be able to communicate exactly what it's about and why you're doing it but I don't for one minute think you need to be gay yourself to back the fact that people should be treated equally. It's often a case of educating and opening people's minds to think 'would you like to be in this situation?' Rather than forcing it on people, you explain it and you get them to relate it to their own life – then it becomes much easier. *Chris Hamilton, Chairman, Oldham Rugby League Football Club*



Lead or sponsor your LGB staff network

Straight allies also believe that messages coming from senior straight leaders show opponents of gay equality that they are out of step with the core values of the organisation.

I've had grumbles 'why are we giving extra attention to people who're gay or lesbian?' And the reason is because we have a history in policing where our culture was not positive. We have to make sure that history is buried and that we're understanding and welcoming. My aim is always intellectual buy-in from those that are resistant – I think the worst thing you can do is to isolate and ignore them. I want those people in the training room, saying what they think. A successful encounter will be that they understand the work we're doing as an organisation, how this fits into their own role and that they understand how their colleagues feel if there are negative attitudes about.

*Alex Marshall, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary*

Top leaders recognise the limits of what they can do. Whilst they're not in a position to drive every gay equality initiative personally, holding senior management to account is one of their most effective tools to advance gay equality in their workplaces.

I make sure line management absolutely understands that it's high on my agenda. People really look for consistency of messaging so I focus on the people and diversity agenda regularly with my management team. By inference I'm encouraging them to do their level best to adopt an embracing attitude to their staff. *David Cornick, Vice President of Business Partners & Mid-Market for NE Europe, IBM*

Commitment to diversity is a core value for us at Goldman Sachs. Our performance evaluation of senior managers includes a diversity score card which measures the events and training sessions they attend and their participation in delivering training. Our senior managers are also measured on the contributions they make to diversity broadly as part of our performance review system which directly affects promotion and compensation. *Glenn Earle, Chief Operating Officer of European Businesses, Goldman Sachs*



Why wouldn't I want to add more value from seven per cent of my colleagues? If all I have to do is to make sure they're treated with respect and dignity and allowed to be themselves, which isn't a lot to ask in this world, it's not a complicated conclusion to reach. And the loyalty that comes with it is immeasurable. You get more from your staff, it's totally free and it's given with good will.

*Bill Payne, Chief Executive, Metropolitan Housing Partnership*

Formal structures help straight allies running organisations ensure the organisation's commitment to workplace equality for gay employees is put into practice.

My symbolic leadership is backed up by a firm structure that's minuted and audited. I have an Assistant Chief Constable who leads on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues. He has to promote equality and fairness in the workplace and I hold him to account on this – I set out what I want him to achieve and it's in his yearly appraisal. I chair the strategic group and I check that the tactical groups at the local level are achieving what they should be. I have these formal structures because I need a mechanism for regularly checking that we're still making progress. *Alex Marshall, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary*

We have very formal programmes to make sure we know who our employees are, what level they're at, what skills they have and how they can grow. I check how we're doing with our female, our ethnic and cultural populations and with people with a disability. I also make sure that we include people who are LGBT and that we're making efforts to find out how they feel about their development potential and the work environment. *David Cornick, Vice President of Business Partners & Mid-Market for NE Europe, IBM*



Speak out with a simple message about why you are committed to equality

Many straight allies running organisations feel that their leadership has had a positive impact on how the organisation approaches equality and diversity.

I realise the power of a senior person being visibly proud to be associated with the network – just someone in my position talking naturally about lesbian, gay and bisexual people – so I really use opportunities to talk about it. I've got it on my Managing Director profile, that's prominently displayed internally and externally, when I send messages and when I headline events, and when I've given presentations at universities. *Glenn Earle, Chief Operating Officer of European Businesses, Goldman Sachs*

We made 60th in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, which had a huge effect. We got the Stonewall Top 100 Employers logo on our emails as quick as we could because we need success stories and it's a metaphor for going up. I think that's significant because it indicates our intention not to tolerate discrimination, whether against LGBT people or on the grounds of gender, race, disability or anything else. *Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor, Salford University*

Straight allies in senior leadership positions throughout an organisation have similar motivations to those at the top of an organisation for pursuing gay equality at work.

I've got three young children so a big driver for me is wanting them to grow up in a world where acceptance is the norm and discrimination simply is a thing of the past. Also, at the early stages of my career, 15 to 20 years ago at another bank, there was a lot of sexism in the City. Comments would fly around and I'd feel quite uncomfortable. And speaking from personal experience, in that environment I became very quiet, very introspective, not wanting to stand out, not wanting to say anything and not wanting to draw attention or potentially risk any more comments. So I think when you relate that to what we have now in the LGBT community, I really think we need to understand how that can affect people and that's why focussing on these issues is really important to me.

*Kathryn Hanna, Managing Director, Goldman Sachs*



Offer to become a mentor for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees



The motivation and passion doesn't come from a legal requirement to produce fair policies. It comes out of a deep sense of justice and my conviction that it's just not fair that people are disadvantaged just because they're gay. I'm very conscious that we still live in a very homophobic society and despite all the legislation and the pronouncements from politicians, the evidence of homophobia is there all the time.

*Professor Sheila Hunt, Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery and Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Cardiff University*

Straight allies in senior leadership positions have a key role in transforming their organisation's commitment to gay equality in the workplace into practical, measurable action across departments.

I think cultures absolutely start at the top. How best do I cascade this down? Well firstly through personal example – what I do and say and how I behave. Secondly by my and other senior leaders' engagement with those within the service and the direction I can give to subordinates. And thirdly by putting in place the culture of education to ensure that people understand the need for inclusivity. *Vice Admiral Charles Montgomery CBE ADC, Second Sea Lord, Royal Navy*

We as leaders in the business, by doing the right thing, by demonstrating the right behaviours and by showing that we want to create an environment where people can be themselves can have a great impact. Having leaders who understand that they're seen as leaders and who recognise the length of the shadow they cast is vitally important. People watch everything you do so it's critically important that you're demonstrating the right leadership behaviours. *Chris Murray, Member of the National Grid Leadership Team and CEO, Xoserve Ltd.*

Every year I meet the new intake – about 400 students in a lecture theatre – and it's often said 'you may be sitting next to the person who'll become your best friend and they'll look out for you and you might even end up marrying one of them.' I came in just as that was being said and I stood at the top of the steps and said 'and by the way, did you know that Cardiff is a gay-friendly University and you might be sitting next to the person who you'll have a civil partnership with.' It came back to me later that two or three people in that group are gay and they were actually overwhelmed that somebody in my position could very openly in a big lecture theatre say something like that. *Professor Sheila Hunt, Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery and Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Cardiff University*

Equally some feel that they have a responsibility to advocate for gay equality at work amongst their own peers.

My view is you lead within a peer group in exactly the same way as you lead subordinates: firstly by example, secondly by what you say, and thirdly by a process of education. Every interaction is as much about communication as about education. With your peer group, one just has to do it a little more subtly, lest it sound as though you're trying to hector. *Vice Admiral Charles Montgomery CBE ADC, Second Sea Lord, Royal Navy*

My position in the business means that I can say what I believe is right without being concerned about any consequences – that is precisely the environment we want to create for everyone. *Chris Murray, Member of the National Grid Leadership Team and CEO, Xoserve Ltd.*

Since January, at every big external meeting I've said 'there are two things you need to know about this University: we're now in the Stonewall Top 100 and the University has received the Athena Swan Bronze Award in recognition of its success in recruiting, retaining and promoting women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET). I use every opportunity to make sure that key stakeholders and people of influence like Executive Nurses, Chief Executives of local health boards and anyone else I meet get this message, which I see as a clear statement of the University's culture.

*Professor Sheila Hunt, Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery and Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Cardiff University*



Hold line managers to account about what they are doing to make the workplace more gay-friendly

Straight allies in senior positions believe that communicating clearly to their teams or departments the importance of gay equality at work is central to their role. They feel that their position allows their messages to be more tailored and personal.

This is a people issue and while it's important to articulate the business case, I think it's also important to make the 'treating people properly argument'. I use emotional language and I always make it clear when I talk to people that it isn't a matter of 'these are things we have to do because the law says we have to do it'. This isn't political correctness – it's simply about treating people properly and being a good manager. You've also got to show that you're willing to act and to do things as well as make a statement. You've got to follow it through with action to show that you're willing to put a bit of time into it or sometimes put some money into it.

*Mike Eland, Director General, HM Revenue and Customs*



Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing, just ask gay colleagues and friends for advice

In addition they feel that their role as senior straight allies is to encourage employees to take practical steps to make the workplace more gay-friendly.

The other day a person whom I mentor, who is on the LGBT Network committee, asked that I promote the LGBT focused diversity training session 'Out in the Open'. I sent a message out to the broader division citing my own experiences and encouraging people to attend to help make our workplace more inclusive. Three hours later I received a note indicating that 30 more people from the division had signed up to the course subsequent to my message.

*Nicholas Crapp, Managing Director, Goldman Sachs*

Straight allies in senior leadership positions also have an important role in holding line managers to account.

People know very clearly where I sit on the issues and that's important because I expect them to set the same example. That filters down to team leaders and smaller groups of people who are interacting on a daily basis. I expect them to understand how the organisation thinks on issues of LGBT and diversity. I expect them to be trained and to understand the kinds of non-inclusive behaviour that can influence how somebody may feel about the organisation. *Kathryn Hanna, Managing Director, Goldman Sachs*

It's about making sure that managers know they're held accountable for diversity. You've got to use both carrot and stick in my view and at times be tough with people. It's just like managing anything else in that respect.

*Nicholas Crapp, Managing Director, Goldman Sachs*

Straight allies in senior roles also feel that they are better placed to support lesbian, gay or bisexual staff than those at the top of the organisation. They do this by actively supporting networks, mentoring individuals or providing line management support to employees.

I chair the LGB+ student group, because they also need a champion at my level who respects them and can help to steer them through the university systems and processes and the HEI culture so they find a way to be heard and get what they want.

*Professor Sheila Hunt, Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery and Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Cardiff University*

I'm actively involved in mentoring LGB employees. I offer myself to the Pride Network and to broader groups, and a lot of people reach out to me just for a different voice. My role is not necessarily to guide but to listen, and if I can give employees some different perspectives I definitely will do that.

*Clare Fuller, Vice President for Servicing, American Express*



I believe my role is to facilitate the LGBT community to blossom and grow so when there are issues that they bring forward, I will help them address them by shaping them into the right format to be discussed. Last year we ran an LGBT Across Europe Forum. I hosted that for the two days because I wanted to spend the time to understand what was on their mind, the issues that they faced, and what help they needed to remove those obstacles and get to the next level.

*David Cornick, Vice President of Business Partners & Mid-Market for NE Europe, IBM*



Help your staff become straight allies too by coaching them on how they can make a difference

Developing open and constructive relationships with gay colleagues can help straight allies to grow in confidence and allay anxieties about 'getting it wrong'.

I think everyone's always a bit scared that they'll mess up. Certainly it took me a little while to get over this fear of saying the wrong thing. When I took on the role of LGB executive sponsor I said 'look I'm really scared I'm going to get stuff wrong, use the wrong words and offend people.' But my colleague on the staff network said 'I know you, I know you right to your soul, and if you say something wrong it's because you just didn't know.' So I was reassured that I couldn't mess up, and having that in mind made me bolder and more confident. Once you've got over that, it's a lot easier to have those conversations with people. I've realised that you can always ask forgiveness and people are very good at knowing when it's genuine. *Amanda McKenzie, Executive Committee member and Chief of Marketing & Communications, Aviva*

# 4

## CHAPTER

Straight allies with line management responsibilities play an essential role in driving gay equality at work and the primary motivation, again, is often personal.

From my point of view it's about sleeping at night – being comfortable with how you've managed a situation and dealt with it. You owe individuals that, but you also owe it to yourself. *Elaine Prescott, Team Leader, UK Border Agency*

I've seen friends hiding away because they didn't know what reaction people would have to their sexual orientation. It must be really difficult and for people who've had the courage to come out it's like a weight lifted off their shoulders. So I've always tried to encourage that in staff I manage who I feel have tried to put a protective coating around who they are.

*Pam Hoey, Sales Manager, Lloyds Banking Group*

Line managers have seen first-hand that an equal working environment is a good way to get the best from people.

How can we possibly, as an organisation, encourage our staff to give us all that they've got, without creating the right environment in which they can do that? We know that people perform better when they can be themselves – so how can you have an authentic relationship with colleagues if you don't feel that you can be yourself when you're at work?

*Lucy Malarkey, Head of Neighbourhoods, Gentoo Sunderland*



You get the best out of people if they're happy. If they feel afraid to be out, to talk openly or they feel they have to be careful about what they say or, even worse, if they fear 'banter' or discrimination – then they're not going to be happy and that will reflect on their work.

So for me, as a manager, it's about making sure that your staff feel comfortable so they can be open about who they are.

*Justine Williams, Assistant Director, Barnardos Northwest*

Good line managers feel responsible for setting an inclusive culture and tone among the teams they manage. They also feel they have a far more practical role to play than more senior straight allies.

I think as managers it's not just about managing work, it should be about influencing people too. You still work with lots of people whose perceptions have never been challenged – but through education and by discussing issues when they happen, you can really see their behaviour changing. As a manager I feel I'm in a good position to do that within my team. *Wendy Lister, Service Desk Team Leader, West Lothian Council*

There's a difference between those who say 'I'm here to tell you about diversity because they're making me do it to tick a box' and those who lead with conviction by saying 'I'm here to tell you about this because it's the right thing to do and I believe in it, and I want you to believe in it too, and these are the standards I expect.' *Pam Hoey, Sales Manager, Lloyds Banking Group*

Straight ally line managers feel that using personal examples and stories helps colleagues to understand the issues better and can help them to understand why gay equality at work is important for everyone.

When I met my husband he was sexist, racist, homophobic – every 'ism' you can think of. But eighteen months ago he was on a float at Pride. I've challenged him, I've challenged his friends – and I use him as an example to talk about how attitudes can be changed. Colleagues find it amusing but it gets the point across that if he can do it, anybody can. *Elaine Prescott, Team Leader, UK Border Agency*

I try to build good working relationships with the people that work for me – one where they feel they can talk to me about things. I discuss my personal life and I mention that one of my best friends is gay – I bring those stories out in a way which is

perfectly normal to me. I think that can help people to feel more confident and comfortable themselves.

*Gareth Hall, Senior Manager, Accenture*

Good line managers agree that the skills required to make a difference to gay equality at work are no different from those needed to be a good line manager in other circumstances.

Any manager should respect their team as individuals and draw on the strengths that they put into the group and that's irrelevant of their sexual orientation. If you're a good manager then a degree of being able to put yourself in other people's shoes is what gives you the skills to do it but there are no particular skills needed regarding sexual orientation.

*Louise Pinchbeck, Regional Manager, Lloyds Banking Group*

If you don't know your team, then how can you possibly know what their strengths are? To know people you have to spend time with them, you have to talk with them and you have to let them express themselves, so the whole culture is about, as a line manager, recognising that individuals are just that and that a team is only as good as the people it's made up of.

*Lucy Malarkey, Head of Neighbourhoods, Gentoo Sunderland*



Talk openly about your lesbian, gay and bisexual friends and family at work



A lot of people will say 'that's so gay' and I don't allow that to happen. I take that person away and I talk to them about it. I explain why it isn't acceptable – that there are gay people who work here and they're not going to find that funny. I'm aware all the time of what they're saying and they're aware of the boundaries now – you can see a real difference in the way that they're with people.

*Wendy Lister, Service Desk Team Leader, West Lothian Council*



## Challenge any homophobic comments or 'banter' firmly and immediately

Straight allies who are line managers know that they have to challenge any homophobic behaviour firmly and effectively manage resistance to gay equality in the workplace.

Some staff had strong views about our Safe Zone LGB training – why was it being done and did they have to participate? I made it very clear that this is training that all staff undertake and explained the reasons why – it's about ensuring that everybody's treated fairly and that people feel comfortable in the workplace. I also made it very clear that this is how we expect people to behave when they're in the workplace. *Justine Williams, Assistant Director, Barnardos Northwest*

Many straight allies have lesbian, gay or bisexual people working for them and therefore have a role in supporting them, some of whom may need support to come out at work.

People give their most when there's a social connection and I really think the little things a manager does have a greater impact on the individual than they realise. Someone's got to set the tone and, as a manager, in the same way as it's your role to stamp something inappropriate out, you've also got to be able to bring people into a team. That doesn't have to be a big grandstand thing – it can just be a chat by the coffee machine. I always make a conscious effort to ask what people are doing on the weekends and to bring them into the conversation by asking 'what did you and your partner do this weekend?' because gay colleagues may sometimes be reticent to offer that until actually invited into that conversation.

*Chris Light, Audit Senior Manager, Ernst & Young*

I have a gay member of staff who was a member of the LGB network group but I encouraged him to take on a greater role. In his appraisal we included an objective in relation to his involvement with the group and made sure that he had training opportunities to support this development. He first became a member of the executive board and then co-chair of the group. I think these have been good opportunities for him personally but also it's been good for the organisation to have his input. I feel I've behaved as any line manager should and that's simply to provide their staff with a supportive fulfilling environment in which they're able to be themselves.

*Tina Barnes, Programme Manager, Citizens Advice*



If a staff member wants to come out be clear you will support them

Good line managers agree that it's important not to be afraid of making mistakes. Talking to gay colleagues is an easy way to check they're getting it right.

You don't always use the right terminology or say the right thing. Having a safe environment helps, where people can point things out and you can learn from others. I've certainly learnt from spending time with people from the LGBT network group – I've widened my knowledge of the issues gay people can experience within the workplace.

*Justine Williams, Assistant Director, Barnardos Northwest*

I've probably said inappropriate things in the past, but being informed is important and I try to get people to understand that questions are part of that. You might say the wrong thing, but if you say it in a well-meaning way, then most people will understand that it's a question that's coming from the heart.

*Lucy Malarkey, Head of Neighbourhoods, Gentoo Sunderland*



I don't think the skills you need to be a good line manager of gay staff are any different. People bring different qualities to the team and it's about understanding that you're there to support people, because to get the best out of your staff you really need to allow them to be themselves and to feel comfortable in the workplace.

*Justine Williams, Assistant Director, Barnardos Northwest*



I'm only a little manager, I haven't got a lot of power but the things that I'm able to change I certainly will do all the time. I live my life like that, because I fundamentally just want life to be better for everybody. For me, it comes from the heart. I can't bear to see a person being destroyed because of something that to me is completely natural. *Wendy Lister, Service Desk Team Leader, West Lothian Council*

I've got alliances within the regional forum and I'll seek support from them, because I know they'll be happy to share ideas or listen and tell me 'that might work, that might not work.' Having that informal support and guidance helps me to feel more comfortable if I'm thinking 'I could get this wrong' or 'What's the best way of addressing this?'

*Amanda Stuart, Children's Service Manager, Barnardos*

Many line managers feel that being a straight ally is both personally and professionally rewarding.

It shows that you can organise things and get work done. Personally I've learnt tonnes from getting to know so many different people and the values that you learn from doing this sort of work can't help but rub off and help make you a more rounded person. You become more appreciative of people's individuality and the different skills that they bring.

*Alan Wootton, Team Leader, Environment Agency*



Explain why gay equality is important to you in team meetings, inductions and supervisions

## 5 CHAPTER

Straight people at any level in an organisation, even those without management responsibilities, can have a significant positive impact on people's behaviour and help to make their workplace more gay-friendly. The motivations for these straight allies often stem from personal values.

You just do it because you believe in it – you have to. If you don't stand up for what you believe, you're just a spineless jellyfish. And really what's the worst that can happen if you step in with a few words to say something's not right? For me, that doesn't take a hell of a lot of balls. *Martin, Graphic Designer*

I just don't think that people should be treated any differently just because they may not be heterosexual. I don't see that it makes them any different to anyone else.

*Louise Bailey, Permitting Officer, Environment Agency*



Talk to your gay friends and colleagues about what challenges they face at work

Many are inspired to stand up for gay equality at work because they have gay friends or family-members.

Members of my family are gay – they’re not an alien race. They’re my closest family members in every way. I’d stick up for my sister if she was being picked on. I don’t think about it. I just do it because you believe in it. I don’t go out of my way to be a guardian of gay rights – that’s not what it’s about. It’s just instinctive. *Martin, Graphic Designer*

My inspiration is my friends. I feel privileged to have gay friends because I see a side of society that a lot of straight people don’t. They have this illusion that gay people are ‘like this and they do this’ but they’re actually not. My gay friends taught me a lot of things so I feel I should return that to them in the best possible way I can. *Alex Little, IT Manager*

Some meanwhile recognise that being a straight ally has helped distinguish them from their colleagues.

It does give you some visibility that you care about it. So from a completely non-altruistic perspective it’s an opportunity to be noticed, to show that you care and to be involved in things that aren’t your day to day work, but which are still incredibly important and valued by the organisation.

*Corey Dixon, Associate, The Parthenon Group*



It affects everyone so it's important that straight people do pick up on inappropriate stuff they hear because that will really help gay colleagues that aren't out at work. They might leave work because there's a lot of homophobic 'banter' – so you could lose a good employee just because of stupid conversations in the office. *Alex Little, IT Manager*

Straight allies agree that one of the most effective ways to make a difference is to challenge homophobic behaviour. They know that this type of negative workplace culture affects everyone in an organisation.

A joke email went round – the punch line was at the expense of gay people. It was sent to lots of people, and everybody was replying saying ‘That’s really funny’, and adding to what I felt was the insult to gay people. I replied ‘I didn’t find it funny, and in fact I found it insulting’. Included in the email were a few gay people but it wasn’t on their behalf that I did it. I just felt I wouldn’t find it funny to joke about being black, being a gypsy or any kind of stereotype. It just seems cheap, and a bit like being a bully. *Martin, Graphic Designer*



## Use personal examples to explain why gay equality is important to you

Simply explaining to colleagues why something they’ve said is inappropriate is often an effective way to make them think about it and to change their behaviour.

If you feel it’s bad you should speak up – it shouldn’t be seen as just the diversity person’s responsibility. There are very few organisations that won’t support you in that. Personally I wouldn’t work at a firm where I didn’t have that support.

*Corey Dixon, Associate, The Parthenon Group*

We’ve all been bullied at some time. Sometimes it takes that voice to stand up. If someone’s doing something that you don’t believe in, you should have the courage in your convictions to say what you believe. It’s a fundamental thing to do. You don’t want to be sheep all your life. You need to lead as well. *Martin, Graphic Designer*

I was on the help desk and a colleague used the phrase ‘that’s so gay’ so I pulled him up. I said ‘that’s derogatory towards gay people’. One of them argued and said ‘no, it’s fine, I’ve got gay friends and they don’t mind’. I said ‘well, it’s not – it’s like saying someone’s stupid.’ We actually had someone on the help desk who was gay but not out. That’s partly why I did it and from that point they stopped using that term.

*Alex Little, IT Manager*



## Become an ally or friend of your LGB network group

Using personal examples and stories to demonstrate why gay equality is important to them helps straight allies raise it in a natural way when talking to colleagues.

You don’t have to wear a badge to say ‘I’m gay-friendly’. It’s more subtle than that but by talking about stuff like having been to gay clubs and civil partnerships and about your own family members who are gay – just letting somebody know that it’s an everyday part of your life – may put them at ease with how they feel about their own life. My boss was gay, but it was a predominantly male, stereotypically male work environment so he was never open about his family or his partner. He knew I had close family members that are gay and that made him more comfortable around me to talk about it.

*Martin, Graphic Designer*

There’s a role for straight people to openly talk about their gay friends. Just doing that sends a message that there are gay people out there and they are my friends and they’re exactly the same – it makes no difference. When it’s more talked about people become less willing to attack it.

*Corey Dixon, Associate, The Parthenon Group*



Ask your managers what they're doing to make your team or workplace more gay friendly

Talking positively and actively about gay equality is also another way for straight people to help make their workplaces more gay-friendly and to spread the message that it is important.

The kids look up to me a bit because I play rugby so hopefully some of those kids will believe what I believe, which is in equal opportunities. When I'm in schools talking about it, the first question the kids have got for me is 'are you gay?' And I say 'no, I'm not', and then they'll ask 'why are you doing this then?' And my answer is 'I think it's important for everybody to be treated equally and I think everybody should be able to be themselves', and I think that's the best answer I can give.

*Mitch Stringer, Player, Sheffield Eagles Rugby League Football Club*

Straight allies feel strongly that clear messages about the importance of gay equality from more senior staff gives them confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour if and when it occurs.

You've got to have an organisation that's supportive and have senior people explicitly saying it too. That's so important because if you know that the top of the organisation agrees, then you feel so much more confident to say things at the bottom, which is often where it's taking place. So I think there's definitely a role for further leadership right from the top.

*Corey Dixon, Associate, The Parthenon Group*

# TOP TEN TIPS

**1 GET TO KNOW THE ISSUES** Make time to speak to your gay colleagues, friends and family and find out about their experiences as a gay person at work. They will have ideas about how your workplace can be made more gay-friendly.

**2 MAKE IT PERSONAL** Talking about experiences of your own, about gay family-members and friends you have, or stories that gay colleagues have shared with you (check with them first!) can help others understand why it's important.

**3 BE YOURSELF** For inspiration on how to be an effective ally you need only reflect on your own personal values. Ask yourself, and your colleagues, how would you like to be treated at work?

**4 ASK FOR HELP** Everyone worries about saying the wrong thing but if you're taking a positive step you'll find that gay colleagues are happy to answer your questions.

**5 BE VISIBLE** Make clear public statements about the importance of gay equality to you and your organisation. Making a public commitment to gay equality will help people understand it isn't a tick-box exercise.

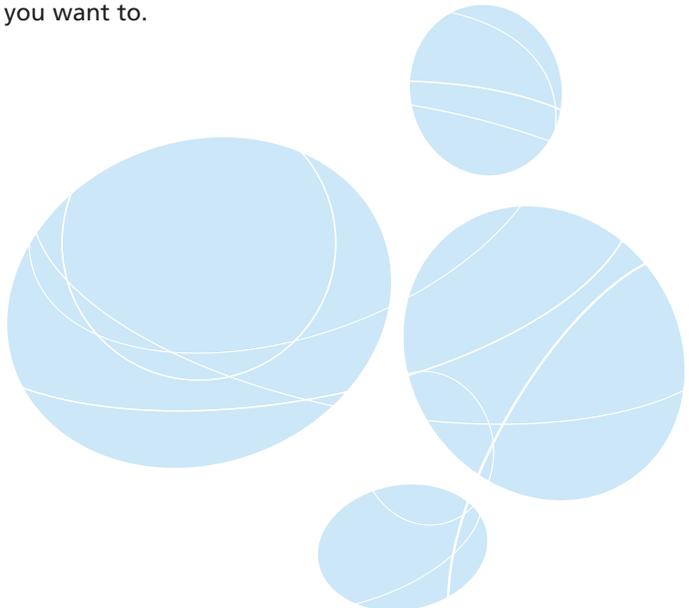
**6 PUT WORDS INTO PRACTICE** Whether you're the CEO or a line manager, people watch you and take cues from your behaviour. Don't simply talk about gay equality, challenge homophobic behaviour, become an ally or sponsor of the network group and attend events like Pride.

**7 DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP** As a leader being visible and saying 'gay equality at work is important' can powerfully affect the culture and tone within an organisation, a division or a team. It also demonstrates the organisation's values to stakeholders, clients and customers.

**8 MENTOR AND SUPPORT GAY STAFF** Their sexual orientation is relevant to their experiences in the workplace and understanding this will help you to manage them better and help them to perform to their full potential.

**9 HOLD COLLEAGUES TO ACCOUNT** No-one can personally drive every single equality initiative. Holding colleagues to account on what they are doing to advance gay equality at work is one of the most effective tools that straight allies have.

**10 MAKE IT NATURAL** There's no right or wrong way to be a straight ally. Be yourself so that your colleagues know gay equality isn't something you're doing because you have to, but because you want to.



### **Stonewall Diversity Champions programme**

Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme is Britain's good practice forum through which major employers work with Stonewall and each other on sexual orientation issues to promote diversity in the workplace. [www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs)

### **Workplace Equality Index**

The Workplace Equality Index is Stonewall's comprehensive annual benchmarking exercise that showcases Britain's top employers for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. [www.stonewall.org.uk/wei](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/wei)

### **The Stonewall Leadership Programme**

The Stonewall Leadership Programme provides a unique space to look at questions around sexual orientation and authenticity and how these can be used to develop an individual's leadership abilities. [www.stonewall.org.uk/leadership](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/leadership)

**Stonewall Workplace Guides are free to download from [www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_work](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_work)**

### **Also in this series of Workplace Guides:**

Network Groups

Monitoring

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Bisexual people in the workplace

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**Thank you to all those who were interviewed for this guide.**

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