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## Welcoming LGBTQi2+ Humans Exploring Human Inclusivity and Allyship

Persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and even those who identify as transgender, have become far more visible, which is reflective of greater societal acceptance. Still, there are challenges facing “Alphabet People,” which many straight and cisgender people don’t comprehend or appreciate.

What can other humans—particularly those who serve or interact with the public—do to make a someone who identifies as LGBTQi2+ feel welcomed and accepted? What actions or words should they avoid?

I’m transgender, having transitioned from male to female in 2009 when I was a trial lawyer with my own transportation-focused law firm in Cedar Rapids. At one time or another, I’ve identified as either gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender. With this presentation, I offer my perspectives on what it means to identify as part of the Alphabet and how to be inclusive of anyone who is “Other” in our society.

### 1. How We Group and Label Others/“GIP” Behavior: Challenges to Inclusivity Countered by Two Saving Graces

- “Inclusivity”: The extent to which a person feels that they “matter” or are of value to an organization or a group of people.
- The power of Human Familiarity—acclimating to Ellie’s voice.
- Making people “Other” via grouping and labeling.
- Neurobiology at work: Humans are wired for grouping and labeling/being mindful that you do it/don’t allow yourself to marginalize others whom you group or label.
- The concept of “GIP” (Group Identifying People)—insider vs. outsider.
- GIPism provides security and identity but also inhibits group members from interacting with humans who constitute “Other.”
- Saving Grace No. 1: Humans have good empathetic hearts and want to do the right thing—hardwiring for **empathy** and **compassion**.
- Saving Grace No. 2: Buttressing empathy by remembering the **Four Commonalities**: (1) wanting a child in our life to succeed; (2) the need to be free of physical or emotional violence; (3) wanting 20 minutes of personal peace; and (4) the need to love and be loved.
- How the Four Commonalities can radically change our fear-driven society to be more inclusive and accepting of all.

- The power of normalization; good and bad.
- A powerful simple statement: Telling someone, "I care about you."

## 2. The Basic Basics

- "Q"= "Questioning" (relative to whether one is even a part of the Alphabet) or "Queer" ("I am just who I am without any other specific label or designation.")
- "Queer" has an historically negative connotation; not so with younger folks in 2021.
- Gender and sexuality on a spectrum for many people.
- Society is now encountering "Gender Queers" (persons who don't identify in either gender).
- A society that only knows and enforces traditional gender roles ("binary"—male or female assigned at birth and nothing else) and sexual identities.
- Religion and religious leaders who are empowering or crushing.
- Younger people who are fearless and far more accepting.
- "2" in the Alphabet—connotes "two spirit" and relates to a Native American who identifies as nonbinary, transgender or gender queer.
- "+" in the Alphabet—it can mean pansexual (someone attracted to all genders/identities) or pangender (someone who feels they are all genders at the same time) or someone else who's not yet described by a letter.
- Sometimes the Alphabet has an "i" (LGBTQi2+), which refers to "intersex"—humans born with both sexual genitalia.
- When the Alphabet has an "A", it's a reference to people who identify as "Asexual," as in not having any interest in engaging in sexual relations.
- Incrementalism (advances and retreats) is often what happens for anyone on the LGBTQi2+ Alphabet. Self-acceptance is the first and most difficult step; incrementally understanding that one's authenticity isn't a "choice."
- Family and friend rejection—because they believe it is a "choice."
- People often have to come out (self-disclose) over and over to different people in different settings. This can be fatiguing.
- **Fear** is a huge factor; so too is a lack of emotional support.
- More fear: being assaulted or killed/being alone/losing key people/losing a job or a place to live if one "comes out" as LGBTQi2+.
- **Losses**: loved ones, friends, employment, church, medical professionals.
- **Authenticity**—it's real, life-changing, and worth the losses.
- Remember this: Human authenticity won't leave you alone until you listen to it.

## 3. Basics re: Allyship

- "Ally" is an *identity*; "Allyship" is a form of *action*.
- An ally acts to help humans who often lack a voice to speak on their own behalf or who aren't always in the room when demeaning or marginalizing comments/behaviors occur, or marginalizing policies or plans are made.

Thus, it's important to understand that "ally" connotes way more than mere awareness and that "allyship" means actively protecting or speaking up in support of humans who lack equity. This may also include calculating the risks of speaking up/engaging in allyship.

- Words and Phrases for \$500: an important first step in allyship is understanding the historical/statistical framework for why certain groups of human need allies. Hence, one must understand words and phrases like "privilege," "marginalization," "sexism," "equity," "legal rights," "mansplaining" and "It was only a joke!"
- Recognizing that there are many "communities" which identify by race, gender, LGBTQi2+ status, ethnicity, disability status, religion, socioeconomic status, age, etc. I know, things are complicated!
- Covering the Territory: Allyship is not limited to protecting/speaking up on behalf of one group. Rather, many groups—women, people of color, persons practicing non-mainstream religions (or none), LGBTQi2+ persons, older persons and persons with disabilities all need workplace allies; sometimes they need for those allies to show up in different ways.
- Culture and Systems: Allyship can't operate in a vacuum. A workplace culture that values marginalized humans/team members operates way differently than a workplace or system that doesn't (e.g., does there exist an inclusivity mission or value statement and/or employee resource groups?).
- Do's and Don'ts: Because we lack a Human Owner's Manual, we humans must figure out things as we go along. As with anything else, there's a right way to be an ally and a wrong way. Every ally makes mistakes; it's critical to apologize; forgiveness is equally critical; and good intent matters on both sides of the equation.
- Intersectionalities: Allyship usually intersects with other core workplace factors, such as management styles; personal growth; political correctness; and balancing workplace life with personal life. Yep, nothing is easy!
- Allyship is inconvenient: a true ally shows up *all the time* regardless of the setting or parties involved. It's not the kind of thing one might turn on or off...
- Compassion=giving of time to be a **mentor or a sponsor**. Sponsorship is the highest form of compassion. It also can be a way of demonstrating allyship to another person or group of people.
- An Acronym to Remember: **ALLY: A** (Awareness—both historical and present-day); **L** (Looking—to protect who is present and who isn't); **L** (Listening—to what's said and what isn't said); **Y** ("Yo"—as in "Yo, that's not a cool thing to say." In other words, actually *acting* as an Ally).
- Process, process, process: It's okay if you miss an opportunity to be someone's active ally—things happen. Just resolve to try harder next time. Persistence does pay off!
- Remember the word, "Uncomfortable"; it's your escape chute.

#### 4. What Ordinary Humans Can Do—9 Things

- **1.** Understand that pronouns and names are critical. Being pronoun proper may take work and involve risk—don't worry, you and others will get through this!
- **2.** If you make a mistake on a name or pronoun, just apologize. Remember that names or pronouns can either be gifts or weapons (most persons forgive innocent mistakes; we're all human). **Good intent matters greatly.** If you're uncertain about a person's name or pronoun, do this, "Hi, my name is Sally and pronouns are 'she/her.'" Offer your hand and wait for the other person to reciprocate. If they don't offer their name or pronoun, then that's it. Don't ask: "Which name or pronouns would you prefer?"—it puts them on the spot.
- **3.** Completely off limits: inquiries or comments about hormones, surgery, or sexual anatomy, unless the inquiry is invited. Moreover, not all LGBTQi2+ persons want to share about their journey; know personal boundaries.
- **4.** Understand that many LGBTQi2+ people will likely have preconceived impressions about governmental or medical entities not being fair or accepting: we're back to fear and mistrust. This is particularly true relative to the judicial system and medical providers—both are gatekeepers which can make or break an LGBTQi2+ person's life in many ways.
- **5.** Don't judge; LGBTQi2+ people are sensitized to being judged. (Most of us have been self-judging for years.)
- **6.** You may need to be an LGBTQi2+ person's champion.
- **7.** Please don't think that living as who we are/how we identify is a "choice." Living authentically is never a "choice" for anyone, whether that's related to gender or sexuality or one's need to write or sing or make music.
- **8.** Evaluate internal systems (HR forms, intake documents, job applications) for how they are gender-specific/binary. Think imaginatively and be willing to spend dollars to change systems to be more trans/nonbinary friendly.
- **9.** Have in place a formal workplace Gender Transition Policy for trans persons who are transitioning on the job; team members must also be taught on how to be welcoming—please use a trainer who is transgender for this!

#### 5. Particular Challenges for Businesses and Government Entities/Resources

- Acceptance of LGBTQi2+ people isn't uniform; better acceptance exists in metro areas compared to the rural Midwest.
- Far less acceptance/greater potential personal risk in "non-legal" states like ND, SD or Nebraska.
- The Court's role as a gatekeeper and its responsibility to ensure for proceedings free of bias.
- Be alert for bias, ignorance, and hidden agendas among colleagues and other professionals.
- Frontline staff need to be educated on how to be welcoming to LGBTQi2+ persons—**Do you know what's happening at your Front Counter?**

- The current environment in our nation is dramatically changing, which is further challenging LGBTQi2+ people in a variety of ways.
- Still much law to be made, particularly with the schools and private organizations.
- There is no national, federal law protecting LGBTQi2+ people. The fact that we have marriage equality (same-sex marriage) doesn't prevent LGBTQi2+ folks from facing legal discrimination—in employment, housing, health care—in the majority of states. (But not so in Minnesota due to the Human Rights Act, MN Stats. Sec. 363A, et al.)
- The biggest stumbling blocks: fear of "Other," religious objections and the idea that being LGBTQi2+ is a "choice" or contrary to God's plan.

**Resources:**

- Suicide Prevention for LGBTQ2+ youth (with an emphasis on trans youth): The Trevor Project ([www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)); Trevor Lifeline 866-488-7386.
- Transgender rights organizations:  
The National Center for Transgender Equality <http://transequality.org/>  
National Center for Lesbian Rights <http://www.nclrights.org/>
- Human Rights Campaign <http://www.hrc.org/issues/transgender> (best practices relative to transgender employees).
- MN blog and email support for parents/relatives of transgender children/youth and adults: Transparenthood.net <http://transparenthood.net/>
- Support group for MN families of transgender children and youth: Transforming Families <https://transformingfamiliesminnesota.org/>
- Twin Cities Facebook Support Group: TeenTIGERS—Transgender, Intersex, Gender Expansive Revolutionaries <https://www.facebook.com/TeenTIGERSMN/>
- Be familiar with local mental health resources and advocacy groups:  
Reclaim (Minneapolis) <http://reclaim.care/>  
OutFront Minnesota <http://www.outfront.org/home>  
University of Minnesota Program in Human Sexuality (provides counseling and gender transition services) <http://www.sexualhealth.umn.edu>
- Mayo Clinic, Rochester MN <http://www.mayoclinic.org/medical-professionals/clinical-updates/psychiatry-psychology/mayo-provides-integrated-care-for-people-with-gender-dysphoria>
- Family Tree Clinic: <http://www.familytreeclinic.org/services/trans-health-services/>
- Greater MN resource: CentraCare, St. Cloud <https://www.centracare.com/services/gender-medicine/>
- Minneapolis Public Schools Comprehensive GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) Resources: <https://engagement.mpls.k12.mn.us/out4good>

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Listen to podcasts from my AM950 radio show, "Ellie 2.0 Radio" with this link: <http://www.am950radio.com/events/ellie-2-0/>

Nationwide consulting services include creating organizational diversity and inclusion plans, assisting employers with employee on-the-job gender transitions, and on-site trainings relative to diversity/inclusion (Gray Area Thinking®), LGBTQi2+ issues, and "Transgender 101" presentations. I'm also working to change the rural Midwest diversity/inclusion landscape with The C\* Project presentations.



*My Standing Offer:* any human can contact me relative to gender or sexual identity or anything else related to surviving the Human Condition. I'm a good listener and willing to meet with anyone in a public place or speak on the telephone for up to an hour. My email: [elliekrug@gmail.com](mailto:elliekrug@gmail.com)

*Please have compassion for yourself and for others!*

*ellie*

*Encouraging Open Hearts and Thriving Human Spirits*

Human Inspiration Works, LLC: *We make inclusion an action word*