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Equal Values

By advancing the cause of workplace inclusion for LGBT employees, corporate America is doing well by doing good

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Corporate America often leads societal change, and that has been very much the case when it comes to building lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. While advocates are working to pass LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination employment laws on local and national levels—federal legislation was introduced in both houses of Congress back in April—employees can still be fired for being gay in 29 states, and for being transgender in 35 states. This situation clearly plays a role in explaining the fact that nearly half of LGBT people are still closeted at work. In corporate America, meanwhile, rapid change

is taking place in the policies, processes, benefits and programs that protect LGBT employees and their loved ones, as well as in improving the overall work climate for these workers. It is proving a happy union.

Consider that when the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index launched in 2002, only 13 U.S. companies received the top rating of 100 percent. Last year that number stood at 305, and in 2011, 337 businesses employing more than 8.3 million full-time workers received the top grade. These companies touch all industries, from financial firms like Allstate, Ernst & Young and Prudential to legal giants such as Sheppard Mullin, from airlines such

as American Airlines and Southwest to tech leaders like Google and IBM. Small and mid-sized businesses are now following suit to catch up to their larger counterparts.

"Creating environments where people can work without fear of discrimination ensures a more productive workforce," says Herndon Graddick, senior director of programs for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), a nonprofit organization that builds public support for LGBT equality through the media. GLAAD recently expanded its work include meeting with companies to discuss best practices for LGBT workplace inclusion. "Corporate America is about the bottom line; full



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equality and fair treatment of LGBT people is the way to get the most out of them for your company,” says Graddick.

Non-discrimination policies covering both sexual orientation and gender identity, with meaningful benefits, are good starting points, says Selisse Berry, founding executive director of Out & Equal Workplace Advocates. Berry points to an “explosion” in the number of LGBT employee resource groups (ERGs) as one example of creating a culture of equality and safety.

“Measuring the quality of the work environment and the success of inclusive policies for LGBT employees is vital,” Berry says. “Forward-thinking companies are very thoughtfully tackling questions like the wage gap that arises when same-sex couples are taxed on their domestic partnership benefits but married opposite-sex couples are not.”

At Hilton Worldwide, the company leverages inclusion by offering domestic partner benefits and mandating a non-discriminatory policy that encompasses sexual orientation. This fall, Hilton will launch an LGBT Team Member Resource Group to complement its ongoing diversity and inclusion training, and will be recruiting at the 2011 Reaching Out MBA LGBT Conference (Oct. 13–16 in Dallas) to further build a pipeline for current positions in the company. In addition, the diversity council within the Hilton Grand Vacations brand is creating partnerships with LGBT organizations to increase the number of LGBT timeshare owners. Moreover, Hilton is partnering with the LGBT community to identify investors for franchise opportunities, while dedicated salespeople are focused on leveraging the LGBT market.

“Our workforce is a reflection of the communities in which we serve every day, so it’s important that we embrace diversity and inclusion at all levels of the company,” says Rob Scypinski, vice president, sales and marketing, The Americas for Hilton



Worldwide. “That leads to innovation and helps drive our company’s performance. Our ability to live our core values is only enabled by our leadership’s position that diversity is not a program—it’s about culture and a market-driven strategy.”

Allstate, recipient of a perfect score on the HRC’s Corporate Equality Index four years running, has seen a 20 percent rise in membership since its Employee Network and Business Resource groups launched in 2006. Allstate is also the recipient the 2011 GLAAD Corporate Responsibility Award. This award is presented for sustained and creative corporate commitment to the LGBT community.

“Harnessing the power of employees from all walks of life has not only been our business but our pleasure,” says Mike Escobar, Allstate’s chief diversity officer. “Employee Network and Business Resource groups are an important component of the company’s diversity strategy. Our groups represent the ‘voice of the people,’ support execution of inclusive diversity, extend our reach into communities and provide developmental opportunities for employees.”

This year, the company updated its Family and Medical Leave Act policy to

include domestic partners and civil unions. Its non-discrimination policy already included gender identity and gender expression language; Allstate’s annual inclusive diversity survey includes LGBT demographic questions, and its diversity training for all employees includes LGBT information.

“Inclusive diversity is a core value of our company,” Escobar says

Loren Ruch is the director of Original and Special Event Programming for HGTV, a division of Scripps Networks Interactive. Ruch often felt isolated and marginalized growing up, but he was open about being gay during his interviews with Scripps, including the fact that his partner would need to relocate with him to Knoxville, Tenn.

“The company was tolerant, encouraging and forward-thinking about the entire situation,” Ruch says.

As it happened, Ruch’s partner of 13 years, David Salas, was employed by Scripps Networks Interactive not long thereafter. This led to a hurdle when Ruch was transferred to New York last year, as Salas was then firmly entrenched in his position in Knoxville. After a talk with his manager, Salas was allowed to move to New York and retain his position, leaving both men feeling that they received consideration equal to that of an opposite-sex married couple.

“I’m proud that as an employee of Scripps Networks Interactive, I am accepted for who I am. I have a thriving career that allows me to be open and honest about myself,” says Ruch. ●

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Going to Market

It turns out that LGBT people pack a mighty wallet and are loyal consumers to boot. These facts aren't going unnoticed

Money talks. Loudly, in the case of LGBT people. The total buying power of the LGBT adult population is estimated at \$743 billion, according to a 2010 analysis by Witeck-Combs Communications and Packaged Facts. This audience becomes even more attractive when one considers their extreme brand loyalty.

"Brand loyalty is a key differentiator for LGBT households," says Witeck-Combs' Bob Witeck. "As a long overlooked or marginalized consumer bloc, LGBT people generally value those companies and brands that speak to them respectfully, inclusively and warmly. Companies that 'get it' tend to be rewarded with continued patronage and consideration time and time again."

Increasingly, to "get it" means more than advertising in LGBT niche media. It is also about including LGBT Americans in mainstream advertising campaigns; and sponsorship of LGBT causes, organizations and pride

marches, for starters, in support of "walking the talk" on workplace inclusion issues. When Diageo launched RÖKK Vodka, for example, the company used the tagline "Filtering Out Inequality" on billboards and outdoor ads in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, and RÖKK was the presenting partner of the 2011 GLAAD Media Awards, donating more than \$400,000 to GLAAD.

"Companies need to be seen as transparent and authentic in their approach to things," says GLAAD's Graddick. "The LGBT community has different mechanisms to check in and see where their money is really going that have been extremely effective."

Corporate America is still behind news and entertainment media in terms of including LGBT Americans in mainstream advertising campaigns, says Graddick, but progress is visible. "Companies like American Airlines, Orbitz, Kenneth Cole and Macy's, for example, are beginning to break down barriers in marketing channels," says Bob Witeck. "They're making efforts to talk not only

to LGBT customers but also to their families and straight friends—reminding them that LGBT people are part of everyone's lives, our workplaces and the entire community." This October, GLAAD'S 2011 Amplifier Awards, which honor the best in LGBT-inclusive advertising, will highlight a broad spectrum of industries. Google, GE and Kaiser Permanente, among others, will be honored for ads that ran in mainstream media outlets, including *Family Circle*, that featured LGBT people. Surely helping in this regard are the uptick of LGBT images in the media, LGBT people holding positions of leadership and the more than 50 percent of Americans who support marriage for gay and lesbian couples, according to a May 2011 Gallup poll.

"In general, I think people want to do the right thing," says GLAAD's Graddick. "More companies are seeing equal treatment of the LGBT community as a way to do that and what's best for their bottom lines in an area with growth potential." ●



A RÖKK Vodka billboard:
The Diageo brand's outdoor ads appeared in New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

Diversity lives here

Embracing diversity is more than just a workplace trend. It is an inclusive way of thinking, working and living that pervades everything we do, every day – from the people we hire to the programming we create to the vendors we select.



Ted Allen
Chopped
Food Network

Pat and Gina Neely
Down Home
with the Neelys
Food Network

David Bromstad
Color Splash
HGTV

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This year thousands of teen drivers will end up as passengers.



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Visit facebook.com/Save11 today, where you can email your Congressperson and tell them to support national GDL laws.

Thousands of young lives are counting on us all to make it happen.

Now is the time to make the world a safer place for teen drivers. That's Allstate's Stand.

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Life
Retirement

The STANDUP Act is the Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act. Sources: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Fatality Facts, 2007-2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008. The Cupped Hands logo is a registered service mark and "That's Allstate's Stand" is a service mark of Allstate Insurance Company, Northbrook, IL.

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