10 Key Strategies for Successful Transition on the Job

by

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International Foundation for Gender Education, Inc.
22nd Annual Conference, Tucson, AZ
April 2-5, 2008

1. **Personal preparedness and planning** are the baseline essentials—the foundational blocks. Being emotionally and psychologically ready for transitioning at work is vital; have a good part-time real life test under way and get as comfortable in your target gender as you can. Acquire a professional wardrobe appropriate to your workplace, and practice grooming until you are at ease. Have as much stability in your personal life as is possible (coming out to family and friends, figuring out divorce custody issues are all done well before coming out at work). Develop the interpersonal skills to communicate with management and others professionally and effectively. Work is the last place to transition.

2. **Establish your value to the company as an employee:** create a good work record, and obtain copies of performance evaluations. If you are doing well, obtain an evaluation several weeks before you disclose to establish a baseline. If you have had difficulty in the past, but are now performing well, see if old items can be removed from your personnel file—often they can. Foster good relationships with the people you work with. If they know a little bit about you and like you, they are more likely to be sympathetic when you announce your plans to transition.

3. **Support systems:** have good support systems in place: online support, friends, family, support groups, and trans organization membership. You need a place outside of work to talk about any negative experiences you might have, to share the positive changes you are excited about, and to help you keep everything in perspective. Make plans with your supporters to utilize their help and remember to use them!

4. **Know your workplace:** again, establish and maintain good relationships at work. Identify the key players in your workplace: your supervisor(s), human resource people, union representatives, upper level management, LGBT organization, employee assistance professionals, special task force representatives, etc. who could contribute positively to your transition team. Identify potential problem people and issues, and tune into office politics. A big **DON'T**: do not begin to disclose your upcoming transition to people you “think” you can trust. This frequently does not work and often results in the need for a lot of damage control which does not endear you to management.

5. **Know your rights as an employee:** be aware of federal, state and local statues that may apply to your transition. Be aware of company policies regarding LGBT people, sexual harassment policies, workplace violence policies and OSHA regulations for the workplace. Find out what the dress codes are, if any, for both men and women.
6. **Therapist participation in the workplace transition:** have your therapist ready to be supportive in dealing with management, human resources, unions, etc. If your therapist is not willing or able to take an active role seek a professional workplace transition consultant or a transsexual who has transitioned in a similar setting to use as a liaison. Your therapist consultant can help you decide who in your organization to contact when you are ready to come out and can assist in putting together a confidential transition team at the workplace.

7. **Educate management:** take a leadership position as the expert on issues regarding trans people and transitions. Back up your expertise with the authority of others: provide books, articles and resource lists. At your first meeting, have a letter from your therapist explaining the rationale for your upcoming transition. Have a packet of information about transsexualism/trans issues and the process of transition to pass out to everyone to read; this should include a very brief summary as well as more in depth information. Your transition will go most smoothly when management is solidly behind you and can lead and advocate with coworkers on your behalf effectively and appropriately.

8. **Cooperate to resolve issues:** approach transition with a spirit of cooperation, expertise and willingness to compromise. Have solutions in mind regarding the handling of patrons or clients and any other potential problems you can foresee. If you anticipate a restroom issue, bring it up with management straight on—ducks this issue will not work. Have your therapist and human resource people assist you to work pro actively and cooperatively regarding this issue. Compromise and consensus are the keys here. Work with your therapist to engage people’s positive and compassionate feelings for your courage and your struggle as a trans person.

9. **Informing coworkers:** prepare a coming out letter to key coworkers which discloses what is happening without revealing unnecessary personal detail. Have your letter approved by management before presenting it. Request appropriate education and sensitivity training of management, staff and coworkers regarding transgender and transsexual issues. This type of training goes a long way toward reducing workplace hostility and lost productivity due to employee discussion regarding your transition. Despite your expertise, you are not the best person to provide this training. Your coworkers should be able to ask questions and have them answered without breaching professional boundaries.

10. **Document your transition:** keep a notebook in which you document everything that happens at work relevant to your transition. Take notes as necessary while you are at work but maintain your journal at home, or take your journal back and forth to work. Keep copies of all written communications regarding your transition, and take notes on verbal discussions. Print all relevant emails and make transcriptions of relevant voice mails; otherwise you may not have access to them later. Document any unpleasant incidents, including date, time, place, names and description. This is your personal record that helps you objectively evaluate how you’re being treated and allows you to file a complaint if necessary.

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