

Outing yourself at work



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Coming out as gay or lesbian to your parents and friends can be a difficult decision.

Telling your boss and co-workers can be even more stressful because you can't help but think how knowledge of your sexual orientation will impact your job, career experts say.

"Coming out is an individual decision and could be a liberating thing," says Amy Lieberman, executive director of Insight Employment Mediation LLC in Scottsdale. "There are pros, but there are also consequences, such as how people (co-workers and bosses) respond."

Most psychologists say that coming out at work typically improves lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers' "quality of

life" because finally they can be honest and open with co-workers.

"The employee should be allowed to talk about their weekend and feel comfortable in their workplace," Lieberman says.

But there's always the risk of discrimination after coming out at work, and anti-discrimination laws vary from state-to-state. For example, Arizona does not have a law protecting LGBT people from discrimination in the workplace, although some cities and many businesses do have such policies.

Federal laws prohibit employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, familial status, disability, veteran status and genetic information. Sexual orientation and gender identification are not protected classes.

Laws are slowly changing

in regards to LGBT discrimination, but they're not 100 percent there yet, Lieberman says. So if being open at work is important to you, then you should conduct research on potential employers' policies, she says.

"The larger the company, the most likely it will have an anti-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation," Lieberman says. Also, it's important to talk to the human-resources department about company policies.

Michael Perez, former All-Star Cheerleading program director for North Valley Gymnastics in Phoenix, says he's always open about his sexual orientation at work.

"I'm always true to myself, (and) it has never been an issue telling my co-workers I'm gay," he says. "If everyone is professional, your sexual orientation shouldn't matter."

TIPS

Making the decision to come out at work can be tough. Human-resource experts offer the following advice:

- » **Be certain.** Make sure you're emotionally ready to be known as your genuine self. Otherwise, you could have a tough time of it, and it could impact your job.
- » **Do your research.** Visit lambda.legal.org to view your state's anti-discrimination laws and contact human resources to see where your company or potential employer stand.
- » **Take it slow.** Let people know gradually. Start with those you work closely with first.
- » **Seek others.** If there are other people "out" at work, seek their confidential guidance to see how they approached being open at work.
- » **Know your co-workers.** If you're a new hire, you might want to foster your work relationships before telling them you're LGBT.

Source: Republic research