

# Organisations must pay attention to the lived experiences of transgender employees

*Lived experience is important for human resources professionals to develop an empathetic and inclusive workplace. It helps them understand and address the needs of individuals, strengthening relationships between employers and employees. **Jasmine Virhia** interviewed **Violet**, a trans woman, about her lived workplace experience. Violet is a diversity and inclusion professional who highlights the impact that misgendering at work has on her mental health, shedding light on possible actions by employers.*

---

The International Transgender Day of Visibility (TDoV) was founded in 2009 by [Rachel Crandall-Crocker](#), a transgender activist from the United States. Since its inception, TDoV has gained global recognition, serving as a platform to amplify transgender voices and advocate for their rights, playing a crucial role in acknowledging the experiences and resilience of the transgender community.

As part of the [Diversity and Productivity](#) programme, researchers at [The Inclusion Initiative](#) have been conducting interviews across multiple sectors in the UK, to better understand the enablers of, and barriers to, productivity for professional workers. The research focuses on understanding the experiences of those typically underrepresented in the workplace, such as ethnic minority women, those who are disabled, and people who are trans or gender fluid.

To celebrate TDoV, I'd like to amplify the voice of Violet, a trans woman who is a diversity and inclusion (D&I) professional and kindly shared her workplace experiences with me. The following excerpts from our interview aim to provide you with points to consider around trans inclusion in the workplace.

## The importance of lived experience

Lived experience provides valuable insight into the diverse perspectives and challenges

---

faced by employees, enabling human resources professionals to develop more empathetic and inclusive policies. Incorporating lived experiences into HR practices enhances decision-making processes and strengthens relationships between employees and the organisation, by better understanding and addressing the needs of individuals in the workplace.

Violet started her professional career working in an environment that was not conducive to her mental health or productivity. This ultimately led to her leaving the role:

*I started off working in a construction company as their office manager. The culture there was just toxic. It's probably the worst job I ever had in my life because it was a very macho, masculine culture. Most of the people there have either worked in construction all their lives or they've been in office roles but in a completely male dominated culture, and I felt like an alien there. I wasn't out as trans. I was very closeted. I wasn't out about my sexuality or anything like that, and put on this epitome of a performance at work of who I was. There was a real culture of bullying there and it was a horrible place to work. It was really bad.*

Violet then went on to explain that she had become increasingly sure about the type of work she wanted to pursue, and the type of environment she wanted to work in:

*[The place where I work now] are a mutual, which means they're owned by their customers and their staff, which I loved. I was just there like, "This is a vibe that I can get behind." All companies have problems but I knew this was somewhere that I could get on with, because by default they're going to have slightly better morals than the average business. And then from there, I decided I was committed to working in HR because I wanted to be part of the system that would prevent the kind of stuff that I experienced in that last job from happening to someone else. I wanted to be the one that could hold people to account for poor behaviour. Back then, D&I wasn't a thing that people talked about, there weren't D&I practitioners, and it wasn't a job title that you could have, but I knew that's what I wanted to do.*

Violet has since worked in HR and D&I for several years and reports that her current organisation strongly embraces difference:

*I'm in a good place right now in my life. It's good. It's nice. I feel like I'm doing far more than I've ever done and it's really good. I feel like for a long time my life had been on pause and now it's actually just happening.*

## **Inclusive workplace practices**

The first step any organisation should take towards trans-inclusion is to review and ensure their policies are trans-inclusive. Consider those recommended by the [Human Rights Campaign Foundation](#), which include non-discrimination policies; name and pronoun usage; facilities access; confidentiality and privacy; training and education across the whole organisation; and healthcare coverage.

Violet highlights the impact that misgendering at work has on her mental health and explains how she is offered greater flexible working as a result. The existence of flexible working policies does not mitigate the fact that when working with trans colleagues, it is imperative to use correct pronouns and acknowledge your trans colleagues' identities:

*Everyone's expected to go into the office three days a week and work from home two days a week, but I get allowed to flex that more than other people because sometimes I just find it too draining being around people. I've been misgendered too frequently and I just find it can wipe me out mentally. Most of the people that I work with now never knew me before. I've transitioned while working here, but I changed jobs after. As much as people know I'm trans, they know me as a woman and that's all they've ever known me as, but sometimes I'll still get misgendered by them. That hits way harder than if someone I knew before does it.*

More generally, greater diversity in your organisation is likely to foster better inclusive practices that are cultivated organically and driven by your employees. Violet, who is dyslexic and has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), also explained the following:

*I'm a big advocate of doing pre-sharing before a call, so that people can familiarise themselves with the content beforehand. Some people are reflectors, so, therefore, they'll engage better in the session on the day. And I always say that if you accommodate everyone's styles, you'll get more out of*

*people in the session.*

As Violet highlights, practices such as pre-sharing aren't solely beneficial for neurodiverse employees but have the capacity to enable greater productivity for all.

## **Career development and feedback**

Providing your trans employees and colleagues the opportunities to develop their skills and increase their visibility in an organisation is essential, not only for fostering inclusivity but also for addressing systemic barriers that trans individuals face in reaching senior positions. Violet enthusiastically recalls:

*My boss's boss has kind of stepped in a bit more in shaping my future, pointing me at stuff and going, "Right, you have a gap here, this is where you have a gap in your understanding, a gap in your knowledge and a gap in your focus. Do this," and gives really meaningful feedback about what I've not done and helping me understand why I've not done it.*

## **Amplify trans joy**

Across sociological research, there currently exists a deficit in the focus of joy, particularly for minority groups. This suggests that research conducted to better understand aspects of people's lives may be focussing more on negative experiences and issues that certain groups face. While understanding such experiences is necessary for achieving equity, the lack of association with positive experiences can perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes and fuel equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) resistance.

Researchers who have conducted [40 in-depth interviews](#) with trans people highlight how crucial joy is to understanding lived experience, particularly quality of life, self-confidence, body positivity and a sense of peace. In celebration of TDoV, seek out forums where you can learn more about these joyful experiences and, going forward, urge your organisation to provide platforms for positive storytelling.

## **Allyship and education**

Your action matters and can make a real difference in the workplace:

**Reflect:** How does your organisation demonstrate their allyship and how can you educate your workforce?

**Join or sponsor [Trans in the City](#):** Gain access to valuable educational resources and join a network of individuals committed to promoting transgender inclusion.

**Spread the word:** Share this article with your network and start a conversation about the importance of trans inclusion in the workplace.

Violet concludes with:

*I want a sense of belonging, not to just fit in. Let's build workplaces that celebrate our authentic selves, together.*

- 
- *This blog post represents the views of the author(s), not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics and Political Science.*
  - *Featured [image](#) provided by Shutterstock*
  - *When you leave a comment, you're agreeing to our [Comment Policy](#).*
-