



Tips for coming out in the workplace

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SAN FRANCISCO – Coming out in the workplace is more and more often a non-issue, no different than announcing you're Episcopalian or play ice hockey on the weekends.

Still, the decision can be fraught, potentially putting job security or the opportunity for advancement at risk.

The Human Rights Campaign has these suggestions for those contemplating following Apple CEO's Tim Cook's example of coming out publicly at work.

First, what is the overall climate of your workplace? Are derogatory comments or jokes acceptable? Are there openly gay staffers? Do people at work discuss their personal lives much?

Second, check to see if your employer has a written non-discrimination policy and whether it specifically covers sexual orientation. Also find out if the company's health insurance covers domestic partners.

Check to see if your state or locality has a non-discrimination law that includes sexual orientation, so you know your legal rights should things not go well.

If you decide to come out, find someone who's gay, or gay-supportive, at the company to discuss it with first.

If there's a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employee resource group, get in contact with it.

Planning out who you'll tell, how and when, is helpful and can make it less stressful.

Bringing up a gay-related news story (say Tim Cook coming out) or a TV show with gay characters, can be a way to start the conversation.

Then, play it cool.

"The important thing is normalizing it," says Suki Sandhu, founder & CEO of OUTstanding, an advocacy group that focuses on LGBT issues in business.

His advice for the person coming out: "Don't make a song and dance about it and say 'I'm gay.' Just drop it in a conversation about what you did for the weekend or when talking about your partner, reference (that person) as a 'he' or 'she' rather than saying 'my partner this' or my 'partner that.'

HRC suggests that the benefits of being out at work include no longer needing to hide, making deeper friendships possible, building trusting working relationships.

Another is that once out, gay staffers can bring their unique perspectives and expertise out into the open, deepening the company's skill set.

"When you're putting your time and energy into hiding who you are, you're not putting that same energy into being successful in your career," says Selisse Berry, founder and CEO of Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, a nonprofit organization devoted to LGBT workplace equality. "It's just so much easier to just be your whole authentic self."