Sexual Orientation and Career Issues Job Aid

“Most people spend more than half their weekday waking hours on the job. Deciding where to work can be one of the most difficult decisions to make…the choice can be more complicated for GLBT…after all, it’s emotionally and intellectually draining to hide who you are or to work in a homophobic environment.”

Advocate, October 24, 2000

A sample of additional issues GLBT students have to consider in the workplace:

In or Out?
Friend or Foe?
Trust or Insecurity?
Honesty or Advancement?
Harassment or Playful Gesture?

At school, GLBT students may experience a supportive environment, active GLBT student groups, supportive friends, and specific policies protecting them from discrimination and harassment. However, workplaces can vary dramatically in terms of support, openness, and protection for GLBT employees.

A few questions for GLBT students to consider about the role of sexual orientation in his/her identity:

1. Are most of your friends, peers and support networks GLBT?
2. Are you active in any GLBT organizations?
3. Do you enjoy going to GLBT events such as Pride, GLBT concerts, etc?
4. Do most of your friends and family members know that you are GLBT?
5. If you have a partner, is he or she out in most situations?

Someone who answers YES to most of these questions may believe that being “out” is who I am. Being visible will provide me with equal treatment and support = strong desire to target GLBT-friendly companies.
Someone who answers YES to some of these questions may believe sexual orientation is only a small part of what defines me as a person. I am very careful about who I tell and don’t tell = lean towards GLBT friendly companies but will keep all options open.

Someone who answers NO to most of these questions may believe sharing information about myself is not preferred. I tell very few people, if anyone at all = prefer a company that will provide me with a high degree of privacy.

**Employer research items to consider:**

- Domestic partner benefits?
- Firmly enforced non-discrimination policies?
- Comfortable working environment?
- Actively embrace diversity?
- Welcome GLBT employees? Some major employers offer formal or informal GLBT groups. Examples: ATT, American Express, Apple, NASA, National Security Agency, Shell, Sears, Target, SBC. Company HR personnel can tell you whether the employer has such an organization and provide contact names.

HRC WorkNet is a national source of information on workplace policies and laws surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Interviewing**

- The key to dealing with issues of sexual orientation is to practice, practice, practice
- You can never be over-prepared for an interview situation
- Make an appointment for a mock interview and practice handling questions regarding sexual orientation or involvement in GLBT groups

GLBT students may find it difficult to ask the hard questions that require answers before accepting a position:

“Will my partner be covered by my health insurance?”

“Will I be legally supported if I am harassed?”

“Does the employer have a non-discrimination clause?”

Students might also prefer not to bring their sexuality into workplace matters at all. They may choose to remain silent or do without benefits because the potential employer offers a high salary or other benefits that measure higher on the list of priorities. They might want to rely on their own research to get some answers instead of bringing up these issues in an interview. *Do what is comfortable.*
The most powerful & gay-friendly public companies in corporate America
(www.gfn.com)

1. American Express Co.
2. Walt Disney Co.
3. Microsoft Corp
4. Lucent Technologies Inc.
5. Xerox
6. International Business Machines
8. Apple Computer Inc.
9. AMR Corp.
10. Citigroup Inc.
11. Gap Inc.
12. Verizon Communications
13. AT&T Corp.
14. AOL-Time Warner Inc.
15. JP Morgan Chase & Co.
16. Intel Corp.
17. SBC Communications
18. Ford Motor Co.
21. Oracle Corp.
22. Coca-Cola Co.
23. Sun Microsystems
24. Texas Instruments
25. Aetna Inc.
26. FleetBoston Financial
27. Bank of America Corp.
28. US Airways Group Inc.
29. General Motors Corp.
30. Boeing Co.
31. Merrill Lynch & Co.
32. Charles Schwab Corp.
33. General Mills
34. Eastman Kodak Co.
35. Qwest Communications Int.
36. UAL Corp.
37. Chevron Corp.
38. Wells Fargo & Co.
40. Motorola Inc.
41. Costco Wholesale Corp.
42. Chubb Corp.
43. Federated Department Stores
44. Enron Corp.
45. Allstate Corp.
46. Gillette Co.
47. Honeywell International
48. Fannie Mae
49. Barnes & Noble Inc.
50. Nordstrom Inc.
2006 Best places to work for GLBT equality (www.hrc.org)

1. Aerospace and Defense
2. Automotive
3. Banking and Financial Services
4. Chemicals and Biotechnology
5. Computer Software
6. Computers and Office Equipment
7. Consulting
8. Entertainment and Media
9. Fashion and Apparel
10. Food and Beverage
11. Home Furnishing
12. Hotels, Resorts and Casinos
13. Insurance
14. Law Firms
15. Manufacturing
16. Oil and Gas
17. Pharmaceuticals
18. Publishing and Printing
19. Retail
20. Technology
21. Telecommunications
22. Transportation and Travel
23. Utilities

Examples include: Aetna, Apple, ATT, Borders, Capital One, Cummins, Dell, Eastman Kodak, Ernst & Young, Ford Motor Company, General Mills, Global Hyatt, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, Kraft, Lincoln National, Microsoft, Nordstrom, Raytheon, Sears, Sprint, Viacom

How can I come out at work in a way that honors my individuality and works well within my current organization?

- Access your readiness
- Perform at your best
- Gather supporters
- Conduct a trial run
- Consider the timing
- Have no expectations

A book titled "OUT In The Workplace" (edited by Richard A. Rasi and Lourdes Rodriguez-Nogues) may be helpful because it describes "the pleasures and perils of coming out on the job."
Other GLBT career resources

- Gay Financial Network (www.gfn.com)
- Gayjob (www.gayjob.biz)
- Federal Globe (www.fedglobe.org)
- Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org)
- Queer Resources Directory (www.qrd.org)
- Out & Equal (www.outandequal.org)
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (www.thetaskforce.org)
- Pride at Work (www.prideatwork.org)
- Progayjobs (www.progayjobs.com)

Transgender issues in coming out and transitioning on the job

Consider the following:

- Legal factors
- Employment factors
- Personal factors
- Preparation of co-workers
- Support network

Resource for Transgender Employees (http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace/7204.htm)

A few highlights of this resource:

- EEO policies
- Database of GLBT-friendly lawyers in each state
- Gender transition guidelines
- Coming out in the workplace
- Transgender Americans: A handbook for understanding
- Searchable employer database

It’s important to have a couple of mentors if possible: one from your “group” and one from outside it. That will offer a broader perspective of the company culture.
Resources:

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