

# Take Pride in a Welcoming Workplace

By Brandon Hallmark

In the 12 years I have worked for Paley Rothman, I have never once felt the need to hide who I am. For a gay man in his mid-30s – on the older end of the Millennial generation – that's surprisingly remarkable. For the majority of my life, the workplace has been a very real source of fear for gay men and women (not to mention transgendered folks). No federal employment discrimination protection exists for gay men, lesbians, or transgendered folks. In our sister state of Virginia, you can be fired by a private employer for being gay. I know legal professionals who have been fired for coming out to their employers in Virginia and elsewhere. It's a question that looms over any queer man or woman at work.

And even in a state with robust anti-discrimination policies like Maryland (Maryland banned employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in private employment in 2001, and on the basis of gender identity in 2014), it could be easier to keep my head down.

I could have hidden behind bland, white guy privilege. I could pass. When the topic of dating came up amongst colleagues, I could have avoided gendered pronouns (a tactic that never works) or made references to my girlfriend from Canada. But I never did – I never hid. I was never dishonest about Canadian lovers or vague with pronouns. I openly spoke about the men I was dating as the topic came up. My bosses and colleagues have met my various boyfriends over time. And that is worth remarking on.

As LGBT Pride month wraps up, *it's worth thinking about why being open and honest matters*. Why it is worth it. From an employer perspective – Paley Rothman figured that out a long time ago. **An open and welcoming environment brings in a diverse workforce that is able to provide you with the best ideas more efficiently.**

Think about it: How much energy would I have wasted if I needed to worry about hiding who I am? How much productivity would have gone down the drain to constant second-guessing, code-switching, and self-policing? It honestly sounds exhausting. At the very least, it would be counterproductive and wasteful. Ultimately, it would have been detrimental to my ability to provide the firm my best work.

So, instead, Paley Rothman gave me the room to breathe. It's a strong decision for an employer to make. And it paid dividends. By being able to work openly, I was able to advise the firm from my unique perspective. I could forewarn of potential issues or note news that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

As many companies have discovered all too late, sometimes it is necessary to have that different perspective in the room, if only to note, "No – that idea is not only inadvertently offensive but is utterly insane." Unchallenged groupthink is a dangerous thing.

The value of a different lived experience – with the perspectives, ideas, and sanity checks that brings – is why Paley Rothman has taken steps to ensure diversity is a priority for our firm. It is why openness and inclusivity are important values we hold, and ones we continue to work on. My tenure at Paley Rothman is a testament to that.

**Be open. Be welcoming. You will find that your employees' best work is provided unhidden.**

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***Brandon Hallmark shares his experience being openly gay in a welcoming workplace in celebration of Pride Month.***

