

Welcoming workplaces norm only for some

LGBT workers remain targets of discrimination

BY REBECCA TONN

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – Some of the nation's top companies are leading the trend toward making the workplace a welcoming environment for all workers.

Forty-one percent of Fortune 500 and 25 percent of Fortune 1000 companies have policies protecting transgender employees from discrimination.

And this year, 305 businesses reached a 100-percent rating on the Corporate Equality Index 2010, compared with 260 businesses last year, according to a Human Rights Campaign Foundation report. When the index was launched during 2002, only 13 businesses reached 100 percent.

Collectively, these 305 businesses employ 9.3 million U.S. workers.

It could be argued that part of being a successful company includes having a nondiscrimination policy.

"Of the 286 Fortune 500 businesses rated by the CEI, 123 received 100-percent ratings, with an average CEI rating of 83," said Eric Bloem, deputy director of Workplace Project for the foundation. "And 11 of the Fortune top 20 companies received 100-percent ratings."

But despite advances toward equality, evidence shows that discrimination in the workplace is alive and well in America.

The results of a nationwide survey and focus-group study of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender workers were released to coincide with the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee's Sept. 23 hearing about H.R. 3017.

The legislation, known as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, was introduced in the House June 24 and in the Senate on Aug. 5.

The HRC study shows that 51 percent of LGBT workers hide their LGBT identity at work, leading to increased workplace stress, less productivity and the inability to participate in everyday con-

versations – which "hinders trust and cohesion with their co-workers and superiors."

Men, younger workers, racial and ethnic minorities and workers at larger companies are less likely to be open about their LGBT identity at work.

When asked to describe a positive work climate, LGBT workers characterize it as one in which they feel free to be themselves, voice their opinions, engage openly in non-work-related conversations, feel safe from discrimination and believe they are valued, accepted and part of a team.

More than 50 studies of discrimination against LGB people have established that they face significant barriers to equality.

Fewer studies have been conducted about discrimination against transgender people.

But transgender Americans have twice the rate of unemployment as the general population.

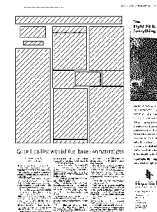
The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund conducted a six-month joint-effort survey with the National Center for Transgender Equality of 6,450 transgender and gender-nonconforming people, in all 50 states, as well as Washington D.C., Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The key finding is that discrimination in employment against transgender people is "a nearly universal experience."

Ninety-seven percent of transgender people surveyed reported being mistreated or harassed at work. And 47 percent lost their jobs, were denied a promotion, or denied a job as a direct result of being transgender.

Employers interested in providing a work environment that is supportive of diversity have many options.

In addition to local, state or federal



laws, or a lack thereof, employers can implement their own nondiscrimination policy.

“It’s a great indicator of inclusion for a company to have their own policy that includes nondiscrimination for sexual orientation or gender identity or expression,” said Ryan Acker, executive director of the Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center.

Acker said that one of the first things LGBT employees look for in a company is whether it has a “comprehensive nondiscrimination” policy.

And employers also can promote diversity in the workplace through programs and focus groups in which participants can talk about what diversity means and “what inclusion looks like” in practice, not just policy.

Such programs can show that an employer is “proactive and recognizes diversity in their employees, clients and leadership as an asset,” Acker said.

Employers and businesses can engage with the community, sponsor events, and offer financial

or volunteer resources.

“If they want to be known as inclusive, employers can be visibly supportive with leveraging of corporate support to help the community and support causes that LGBT people care about,” Acker said.

If ENDA legislation is passed in its current form, it would extend the federal employment discrimination protections that are currently based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age and disability to include sexual orientation. ENDA extends fair employment practices and does not convey special rights, according to The American Federation of Government Employees’ Web site.

ENDA would prohibit public and private employers, employment agencies and labor unions from using an individual’s sexual orientation as the basis for employment decisions. And it provides for the same process as permitted under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, but has limited remedies.

