



A Guide for Integrating Pronouns into Company Culture How To Be intentional and Inclusive with Gendered Language

Transgender, nonbinary, and all other professionals who do not fit neatly into binary ideas about sex and gender fight daily to have their identities acknowledged and respected at work. In South Africa and Brazil, the two countries where we were able to investigate the experiences of TGD professionals with quantitative data, we found that more than one in three TGD professionals are regularly misgendered. In focus groups and interviews, TGD professionals in India, the US, and the UK told us similar stories.

Sharing pronouns is a helpful inclusion practice. As an LGBTQ+ professional in Brazil points out, being able to connect names and faces with pronouns is not just helpful for TGD professionals. On dispersed global teams working over email, employees may encounter names from other cultures that they cannot easily categorize as typically belonging to men or women. “When I guess, I usually guess wrong,” they admit. “So it’s great for us to know people’s pronouns.”

When it comes to pronouns, policies can be valuable—but they are not always translating to practice against a politically charged backdrop and widespread anti-trans sentiment. Allies have a powerful role to play in fostering a culture of belonging and inclusion for their TGD peers. All it takes is an open mind and a bit of practice. Combat “pronoun panic” with the following tips:

- **Understand the basics.**

Personal pronouns are short words that stand in for a person’s name in speech and writing. Transgender people’s pronouns may shift as they transition. Nonbinary people may use they/them instead of she/her or he/him. She/her, he/him, and they/them may not be the only pronouns that transgender and nonbinary people use. There may be regional and cultural differences, even within a single country. Generation is also a factor, as individuals may have neopronouns such as ze/zir. Some gender-fluid or nonbinary individuals may use she/they or he/they.

- **Ask with empathy and model pronoun visibility.**

If a person tells you their pronouns or includes their pronouns in their email signature, use them. If you do not see a person’s pronouns and are unsure, ask. Better yet, offer your own. Signal inclusion to TGD colleagues by including your own pronouns in your email signature—whether they are the ones you’ve had since birth or not: for example, “Joe Smith (they/them)” with a hyperlink to a page about pronouns.

(See pronouns.org/sharing for tips and links.)

- **Correct but don’t overcorrect.**

Mistakes happen. If you or someone else refers to someone by their deadname or an incorrect pronoun, apologize briefly, correct yourself, and move on. If you witness this behavior, step in as an ally and offer a gentle correction. If it keeps happening, offer to support your colleague in a formal report to HR. Approach these situations swiftly and with empathy. Dwelling on your or someone else’s mistake may exacerbate feelings of discomfort and exclusion. Your anxiety about misgendering someone is likely less intense than the anxiety they have about being stigmatized and misgendered.