

## THE GLOBE AND MAIL

### **Beyond the open doors; More LGBT employees are choosing to work for companies that don't just speak about welcoming diversity - they also prove it**

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Almost everyone in Brooks Beaudoin's life knew he was gay; he had come out years ago to his parents, sibling and friends.

There was just one more door to open: at work. But his employer wasn't exactly the gay-friendliest of places.

So Mr. Beaudoin, who had just finished his MBA studies at the University of Minnesota, began to search for another job.

"It was the last part of my life where I still hadn't come out. I knew at that point that I would only work for a company where I could be out and it would be okay."

It took some sleuthing, trolling Internet sites and tapping his network of friends, to find such an employer, but he finally set his sights on global accounting firm Ernst & Young.

And he landed a position there, first as a staff consultant in its Minneapolis offices, and then last summer relocating to its Toronto office as a senior tax staff member in its transfer pricing practice.

He is happy to report that he has found a workplace where he can be himself. And he's not the only one.

After decades of existing as an "invisible minority" in the workplace, many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees - a group often referred to by the acronym LGBT - are now, like Mr. Beaudoin, not only coming out at work but choosing to work only for companies that are LGBT-friendly.

For these workers, experts say, it is no longer enough that employers support workplace diversity; instead, they must declare unambiguously - through policies and actions - that their workplaces are safe and inclusive.

"People are saying: 'Okay, here's my compensation, benefits and perks, and here's what the work environment is going to be like for me as a gay person,' " says Michael Bach, Toronto-based national director of diversity and inclusion at accounting firm KPMG LLP.

At the same time, a growing number of employers are stepping up efforts to make it clear their offices are welcoming.

In the past three to four years, TD Canada Trust, Royal Bank of Canada and Ernst & Young are among employers that have created support networks, and TD announced just this past Monday it would start covering part of the costs of

sex change procedures for its transgender employees.

Procter & Gamble Inc., which has had a gay employee network since 1993, organizes recruiting events at Toronto universities targeting LGBT students.

And, just last week, 11 Canadian companies - including RBC, IBM Canada Ltd., KPMG and Ernst & Young - got together to launch Pride at Work Canada, an organization that will provide support for LGBT employees and employers that want to start LGBT-friendly programs.

Brian McNaught, a U.S. gay sensitivity expert, says LGBT inclusion has, finally, become a business imperative.

He points to two main reasons: the global war for talent, and the desire of companies to claim their dollar share of the lucrative gay market.

"You don't want a talented employee who's making money for your company to start thinking about leaving because he or she heard at a cocktail party that it's easier to be gay at the competition."

Adds Mr. Bach, who is also co-chair of Pride at Work Canada: "In the end, it's about creating a work environment where employees can be themselves."

One way some companies are doing this is through employee resource groups or networks that help LGBT workers connect with each other. Bruce Goudy, head of E&Y's "bEYond" program - which now has 224 employees across Canada on its mailing list - says having access to a community of people with similar experiences helps overcome a sense of isolation.

But E&Y's network goes beyond its LGBT employees, Mr. Goudy says: Heterosexual employees who want to learn more about LGBT issues are also encouraged to join.

While it may be convenient to use an umbrella label, employers should note that the needs and issues of all are not all the same, Mr. Goudy says.

For instance, lesbians may be more hesitant than gay men to come out at work because they fear the double-whammy impact of their sexual orientation and the glass ceiling.

Thomas Dolan, owner of TKD Management Consulting in Vancouver, says employers need to make sure their managers and workers are trained to use inclusive language.

Vancouver City Savings Credit Union in Vancouver makes a point of including the LGBT perspective in most communications. For instance, its employee **health**- benefits brochure features "Elizabeth," an employee in a same-sex partnership.

Several years ago, VanCity ran a series of ads that included one that openly courted the gay market: "Gay-friendly. Since before marketers realized you have large disposable incomes."

The ad was met with protests from the Catholic church.

Mr. Dolan, who had worked with VanCity on the ad, says it was an act that showed it was proud to be an LGBT supporter, even at the risk of losing customers.

Mr. McNaught agrees that a public declaration of LGBT support is necessary if companies want to convince employees of their sincerity. He cites one example of a company that happily endorsed the celebration of Gay Awareness Week in the office. The company's practice had always been to fly a banner outside its building announcing whatever it happened to be celebrating. But on that particular week, no banner was raised.

"If you're going to support your gay employees, then support them openly," Mr. McNaught says. "You don't act like a parent embarrassed by your gay child."

So what results have companies seen so far from their LGBT-inclusion efforts?

In a Globe and Mail on-line poll last week, 59 per cent of nearly 5,500 respondents said they felt their company is becoming more welcoming to LGBT employees.

TD Canada Trust's "pride" network - with chapters in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and London, Ont. - boasts more than 500 members, including heterosexual "allies."

In a company-wide employee survey conducted last year, 80 per cent of LGBT employees said they felt TD was an inclusive workplace.

Steve Yan, a Montreal-based manager of business development for TD Waterhouse Group Inc., says the best proof of the pride network's success may be found at company parties. "People bring their same-sex partners. And nobody flinches," says Mr. Yan, who leads TD's pride network in Montreal.

Anne-Marie Long, senior equity adviser at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, says a number of its employees - gay and straight - have told her they chose to work at UBC because of its Positive Space program for LGBT employees and students.

Barney Ellis-Perry, UBC's director of alumni services, says that working in a place where he feels safe to be gay is "freeing and powerful."

"When our president asked me about my family the first time we met, I told him I have a male partner and he said 'oh, that's great,' " he recalls. "At UBC, being gay is only an issue if I make it an issue."

As for Mr. Beaudoin, before applying for a job at E&Y, he tried to find out as much as he could about the company's attitudes. He even sat down with a member of its HR team for an informal lunch meeting.

"He said upfront that Ernst & Young has an inclusive environment so no need to worry," Mr. Beaudoin recalls. "And he said, 'above all else, be yourself - if someone asks you about your weekend, just tell them what you really did.' "

A few weeks into his new job, Mr. Beaudoin did just that responding to a female co-worker's question by telling her frankly about a weekend activity with his partner.

"Later, she sent me an e-mail saying she was glad I told her and that she hoped it didn't make me feel uncomfortable."

Working for a company that values who he is has been life-changing, Mr. Beaudoin adds. He used to spend his Monday morning commute rehearsing the stories he would tell co-workers about his weekend so they wouldn't clue in.

He no longer needs to do this, and, for that, he's grateful. "I do have a strong sense of loyalty to Ernst & Young which I've never had for an employer before," he says. "I know they accept me for who I am and support me in being as successful as I can be."

## LGBT-FRIENDLY: PROOF IS IN THE POLICIES

Here's how four companies have made moves to embrace their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees.

### PROCTER & GAMBLE INC.

#### THE ACTION PLAN

The GABLE Network - it stands for gay, bisexual and lesbian employees - helps the company organize LGBT events, such as Family Pride, and develops presentations to educate employees about LGBT issues.

Annual recruiting in Toronto targets LGBT university students from York, Ryerson and University of Toronto.

"We see diversity as a competitive advantage for us, and, to be diverse, we must be inclusive."

Jane Lewis, P&G HR manager

### ERNST & YOUNG

#### THE ACTION PLAN

"bEYond," a network where LGBT staff and their allies can exchange ideas and advise the firm on how to be to more inclusive.

Private washrooms available for anyone, but are especially important for transgender employees.

LGBTa - the A stands for allies - inclusiveness strategy leader raises awareness about LGBT issues and encourages staff to be comfortable talking about them.

"LGBT-inclusion efforts are really just a barometer of a company's overall inclusion efforts."

Chris Crespo, E&Y LGBTa leader

### ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

#### THE ACTION PLAN

Resource group called PRIDE (for Proud RBC Individual for Diversity and Equality) provides opportunities for LGBT staff to network and support each other

Learning forums for staff, such as a recent one about LGBT youth

"Our LGBT employees are part of our community. It's easy sometimes to just talk about women and certain groups under legislation, but this is also an important group."

Norma Tombari, RBC senior manager of diversity

KPMG LLP

## THE ACTION PLAN

Pride at KMPG, a resource group that links LGBT staff and helps the firm determine how it advertises to the LGBT community.

A senior executive came out as a lesbian shortly after Pride at KPMG was created.

LGBT employees speak to students at job fairs about being gay in the workplace.

"People who are able to bring their whole self to work are more motivated, more productive."

Michael Bach, KPMG director of diversity and inclusion

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