

LGBTQ+ BEST FRIENDS CONFERENCE

FRIDAY
29 SEPTEMBER 2023

BONELLIEREDE
BREDIN PRAT
DE BRAUW
HENGELER MUELLER
SLAUGHTER AND MAY
URÍA MENÉNDEZ

Key discussion points from the LGBTQ+ Best Friends Conference hosted at Slaughter and May on Friday 29 September 2023. The conference featured a number of sessions exploring best practice across a range of areas, authentic leadership delivered by Liz Ward from Stonewall, and allyship to the ace, aro, trans and non-binary communities, featuring guest speaker and leading asexual activist, [Yasmin Benoit](#).

Best practice session: participants were split into groups to discuss best practice across one area (engaging senior leadership, the role of allies, mentoring, training, and network engagement). Insights included:

Engaging senior leadership

- Support senior leaders in their understanding of LGBTQ+ inclusion and why it is important to the business e.g. when talking with clients who are increasingly interested in what senior leaders are doing to promote inclusion, or when attracting and recruiting LGBTQ+ candidates and students to join the firm.
- Engage senior allies by asking them to sponsor the LGBTQ+ network and help to promote events and awareness dates throughout the year.
- Continue to develop and grow LGBTQ+ networks so that senior leaders can understand the level of engagement across the firm.

Role of allies

- Provide educational resources which explore topics such as how to be an effective LGBTQ+ ally and understanding LGBTQ+ language and terminology.
- When promoting the LGBTQ+ network, always remind colleagues that allies are welcome.
- Run a session for allies to ask questions in a safe space as to how they can support their LGBTQ+ colleagues and friends.
- Provide examples of how allies can demonstrate active allyship such as adding their pronouns to email signatures.
- Explore allyship through collaborations with other diversity and inclusion networks and supporting each other's activity.

Mentoring

- Provide internal and external opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals to be mentored and/or be a mentee.
- Provide guidance and training around how to have inclusive conversations.
- Offer the option for individuals to request mentors from a diverse background i.e. LGBTQ+.

Training

- Provide LGBTQ+ inclusion training for new joiners.
- Organise LGBTQ+ awareness raising events throughout the year, not just during Pride Month.
- Organise social events which offer networking opportunities and help to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging.

Network engagement

- Explore ways to engage with all communities within LGBTQ+ e.g. set up sub groups specifically for women and non-binary or trans and non-binary individuals. Take a proactive approach in encouraging new members to join the network and ensure that new and current members are kept engaged through participation of events and initiatives.
- Promote intersectionality by collaborating with other networks on shared experiences.
- Engage with colleagues across legal and business services teams.
- Hold regular social events that aren't just alcohol focused, avoid clashing with other key awareness dates or events i.e. religious festivals/holy days, and arrange events during different times of the day to accommodate those that may work part-time or have certain commitments.

Authentic leadership session: delivered by Stonewall, this session explored how we can harness the power of authentic leadership as LGBTQ+ leaders and aspiring leaders. We looked at what leadership means, the basics of authentic leadership theory, and we reflected on our own journeys.

What is leadership? What does it mean to be authentic?

- Good leadership considers the three following aspects:
 - Meaning: what are we doing and why?
 - Value: do people care that we're doing this?
 - Structure: is this how we do this?

Authentic leadership theory - four key components

Self-awareness: personal insight is key to authenticity and having a habit or practice of self-reflection is the best way of developing this.

- Self-awareness in this context means being aware of how you are connected and different.
- Authentic leadership is about using self-awareness to understand yourself more.
- No one is one-dimensional. We are different with our managers, clients, colleagues, our partners, our children, the public. Being aware of these facets enables us to be more authentic and use these with skill. For example, use the listening skills you reserve for your nephew with your manager; the decisive voice you use when making decisions at work with other critical decisions.
- Authentic leadership is about understanding yourself, knowing your strengths and weaknesses and developing yourself with intention.

Balanced processing: a skill that allows you to look at yourself, others, and situations with a broad lens, that does not magnify your own view or organise everyone else's view around your own.

- Diversity of thought can prevent damaging decisions.
- Admitting to not knowing is key to being a balanced processor. Do not be afraid of appearing weak which can be challenging if experiencing imposter syndrome.
- Actively seek opinions and listen with an open mind rather than using each opinion to confirm or refute your plan.
- It is easier to surround yourself with people who always share the same viewpoint as yourself but difference can drive creativity and innovation. Accepting different points of view is part of championing inclusion and leveraging diversity.

Relational transparency: it is important to be thoughtful about the degree of openness and honesty we share and the level of risk that we think is possible to take at any time, which can create honest, substantive conversations.

- Transparency can be a risk but creates relationships and supportive environments.
- Lack of transparency can help create non-inclusive cultures in the workplace and emotional issues can become overwhelming if individuals don't feel able to share i.e. feelings of grief or loss, or mental health issues.
- Being proactively transparent involves behaving in ways that help people understand who you are, allowing people to create stronger relationships with you.
- Tell your stories in an intentional, thoughtful, and appropriate way.

Internal moral perspective: have a clear set of values to help you to examine your opinion in relation to others so you are not simply reacting to the opinions of others.

- Behaving in alignment with your values.
- Examining your own actions more than judging the actions of the people around you.
- Knowing your values helps to provide a foundation for leading authentically.
- Think about how your firm's values relate to you personally - what do they mean and how do you live them.
- Reflect on the behaviour of people around you and recognise when they are acting to their values (not only when they do not).

Allyship workshop: delivered by Stonewall, the aim of this workshop was to deepen our understanding of LGBTQ+ identities that we may understand less well, such as aro/ace and trans identities. During the session we looked at developing an understanding of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences in order to confidently advocate for more inclusive workplaces, understanding the crucial role that our networks play in creating inclusive environments and the benefits of doing so, and discussing how our network groups can take practical actions to make our organisation more inclusive.

We were also joined by leading asexual activist, [Yasmin Benoit](#), for an insightful talk on her work, lived experiences and how we can be better allies to the ace/aro communities.

Why pronouns are important

- Normalising the visibility of pronouns in email signatures, meetings, interviews, LinkedIn, when introducing oneself etc. can make it more comfortable and less obvious for LGBTQ+ individuals who have different, changing or less well-known pronouns.
- Some people may feel uncomfortable sharing their pronouns so it should never be mandatory.
- A singular 'they' pronoun can be used for those who prefer it or when you may be unsure about a person's pronouns or gender identity.
- Learning is part of the process - if you do make a mistake, apologise, correct yourself and move on.

Language and terminology

- **Lesbian** - a woman who has an orientation towards women.
- **Gay** - a man who has an orientation towards men. Also, a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality.
- **Bi** - an umbrella term describing an orientation towards more than one gender; including but not limited to bisexual, pan and queer.
- **Trans** - an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Ace (asexual) and aro (aromantic)** - terms used specifically to describe a lack of, varying, or occasional experiences of sexual attraction.
- **Intersex** - a term to describe a person who has the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female, or non-binary.
- **Sex assigned at birth** - assigned based on primary sex characteristics and reproductive functions. Sometimes the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are interchanged to mean 'male' or 'female'.

Understanding identities

- **Gender identity** - a person's sense of their own gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.
- **Orientation** - an umbrella term describing a person's attraction, or lack thereof to other people. This may be sexual and/or romantic.
- **Gender expression** - how a person outwardly expresses their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans.

Allyship

- Ask yourself if your allyship is passive or active. Passive allies are sympathetic bystanders e.g. unengaged or uninformed, whereas active allies will raise awareness, offer mentoring, advocate on behalf of others etc.
- Demonstrate your active allyship but continue the journey of learning about specific issues faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community, such as transphobia and biphobia.
- Here is a '[How to be an effective LGBTQ+ ally](#)' guide created by our PRISM network which provides some helpful tips.

Chat with Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin Benoit is a British model, multi-award-winning asexual activist, writer, speaker, media consultant and researcher. Described as the "unlikely face of asexuality" by Cosmopolitan Magazine, she quickly became a leading voice for the community after publicly coming out in 2017. She started the #ThisIsWhatAsexualLooksLike movement for diverse asexual visibility and representation and co-founded International Asexuality Day (April 6).

Her unconventional approach to activism has been covered throughout British and international press, including Vogue, MTV, Sky News, Paper Magazine, Attitude Magazine and the BBC. In 2022, she launched the UK's first asexual rights initiative - the Stonewall x Yasmin Benoit Ace Project - in partnership with Stonewall. That same year, she won 'Campaigner of the Year' at the Rainbow Honours Awards. Yasmin shared the following insights:

- Ace/aros don't always feel included in LGBTQ+ spaces, are disproportionately affected by conversion therapy, and are often unfairly viewed as callous and cold. Yasmin is working on a research project with Stonewall to understand more around the issues faced by the community to help raise awareness and educate others.
- To demonstrate allyship to the ace/aros community, promote ace awareness through LGBTQ+ networks i.e. celebrate International Asexuality Day, educate yourself on issues impacting the ace/aros community, and invite people from the community to share their experiences with people at your firm.