



LGBT people still face hurdles

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Women aren't the only employees who still feel the glass ceiling when it comes to the workplace.

Michael Bach clearly remembers his colleagues' derogatory gay jokes and offhanded comments that made him so uncomfortable when he was in his 20s. Although he had come out to himself when he was 16, and told his parents he was gay two years later, Bach kept his sexual orientation secret from his colleagues until he was 30.

"I would go to the extent of changing pronouns when I talked about my life," recalls the 39-year-old, who today is the national director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for KPMG LLP in Canada. "So, instead of saying 'my boyfriend,' I would say 'my girlfriend.' It's amazing how stressful that can be." The reason for Bach's double life: His fear of the repercussion that would affect progression in his career.

It's been 40 years since Canada decriminalized homosexuality, and although lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Canadians enjoy legislated human rights protections, as employees they still experience discrimination at work that limits their career advancement, according to a Canadian study released earlier this month by Catalyst.

Deborah Gillis, vice-president for Catalyst, North America, who has worked on LGBT issues for 15 years, says this is due, in large part, to a lack of awareness.

"That lack of awareness and understanding of LGBT individuals leads to discriminatory behaviours, from blatant or direct forms of homophobia, to exclusion from networks or opportunities, to inappropriate humour that's used in the workplace," she explains of the study's findings.

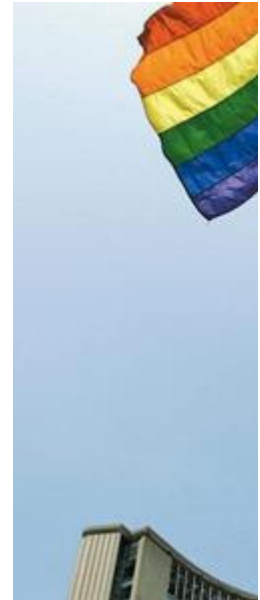
Bach agrees: "There is an enormous lack of awareness about what this subject means," he says adding that this leads to people who don't know, think it's about sex. We're not talking about sex. We're talking about sexual orientation."

Bach points out that when heterosexual employees have pictures displayed of their opposite-sex spouse on their desk, the essence, sexual orientation. "Lack of awareness breeds an environment where people don't feel comfortable just being t

According to Gillis, when companies implement inclusive diversity practices such as training that dispels stereotypes and policies and practices, LGBT employees indicate greater career satisfaction and greater commitment on their part to thei

"Leaders who understand the bottom-line benefits of diversity should be eager to implement LGBT-inclusion programs,"

Scotiabank is one company that has implemented such programs. Not only did it sponsor the Catalyst study, but Scotiabank Network, which, among other things, helps their LGBT employees find mentors.



Aaron Lynett/Torstar
The Rainbow Flag is the symbol of Pride Week. Despite many advances, the LGBT community still faces

Reflecting on a recent event to hosted by Scotiabank to discuss the study's findings, Gillis says:

"Having a discussion in the heart of Canada's financial district with some of the largest businesses in the country, talking organizations, just showed me we're made a lot of progress, despite some of the challenges ahead."