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How Stephanie Came-Out into the World

And Her Workplace Transition

by Stephanie

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I always had the luxury of knowing I had my mothers' support ... regardless.

Times have changed and society is now more open and understanding of the struggles and plight of transsexual people. Gender dysphoria is a condition that takes bravery and guts to firstly face, fight, and then resolve. It is one of the hardest conditions that anyone can face and something none of us choose.

I suggest that you build up a network of supportive friends. It's always lovely to confide in them. If you need to, you can cry on their shoulders, and also share your experiences and victories.

The more people that bravely face their fears and choose to live their life as they feel they should need to be applauded. The following is my personal journey. I will briefly touch on how I came-out to my family, but will expand on my workplace transition. Many people have complimented me on how I actually

went about it all. The whole theme of my journey was to give people 'respect' as "knowledge is power."

I always knew that it would be inevitable that I would transition, but even still, I tried to fight, deny and 'cure' myself. It's all part of the journey. I nearly transitioned when I was twenty-one, but my timing was wrong. I needed to grow as a person and mature. When I finally did begin my transitioning, it went without saying that it was absolutely vital to my life for it to be a success. I studied everything I could, got counselling, set my goals and did what I had to do.

Although it's a bit of a marathon, I hope that this document may be helpful and inspire others going through their own transformation. Follow your own path though, as you, and your circumstances, are unique.

I suggest that you build up a network of supportive friends. It's always lovely to confide in them. If you need to, you can cry on their shoulders, and also share your experiences and victories. Remember, your friends are the family that you choose.

My Family

I always had the luxury of knowing I had my mothers' support ... regardless. She did briefly struggle over my wanting to transition, but saw at first-hand my happiness and then backed me one hundred percent. My father was another story though. Once I knew it was time and began taking hormones, it became essential that the rest of my family knew. Hormones are powerful and work very, very quickly. coming-out is such a hard thing to do, particularly to your loved ones. You risk all in this situation.

I am usually a very positive person but I had to steel myself and was ready for the absolute worst case scenario. Anything above that would be a blessing. I had built up strength through counselling at the Gender Centre, but was still fearful. Amazingly when I flew up to see Dad, my fear went away as I knew I had to tell him. There was no backing out. My body was going to change.

I came prepared. For each and every person, I had an A4 envelope containing a word document with text and photos from my website. Additionally, I enclosed information about gender dysphoria, common misconceptions about transsexualism and a 'Question and Answer' type document aimed at helping loved ones understand. I sealed the envelope and titled it 'Introducing Stef'.

I'd sealed it with the understanding that each person could choose to open it or not. I needed to allow them their feelings, at their pace. I was prepared to answer any question asked of me while in a low key way showing how happy I now was and that this indeed was real.

An interesting footnote was that my brother here in Sydney, didn't open the envelope. He needed more time to deal with it in his own way.

Everyone reacts to such news in different ways. One common one is for someone to treat it 'as a death'. The person they were used to, physically anyway, 'won't exist anymore'. Whether the reaction is good or not so good, always give out love and compassion. Know it will take time. Regardless, a great weight will be lifted from your shoulders and it will be good training for you when it is time for 'the world to know'.

Additionally, I went to talk with my uncles and aunts face to face, which impressed them.

Work Disclosure - Pre-Planning

The key here is to respect power and those in authority while remembering that your bosses are only human. You need to know that how your bosses deal with the situation long-term will be modelled throughout the organisation. Thus you need to demonstrate that you respect them and that you hold the image of the company very highly indeed.

You need to have researched your own situation thoroughly and appear confident and in control. Assume that they have never come across a 'real' transsexual before and that they need to be guided by you on what to do next.

I did this with the aid of hardcopy folders (one for each person). Within each of these folders, I had information divided into six categories. The first, titled About me, stated my condition and gave a little insight into my life. Additionally, it contained a few paragraphs on what will happen next, and also indicated a rough timeline.

About Me

I have a medical condition known as gender dysphoria. I have been a transgender person all of my life. From when I was young I've always felt 'different', and no amount of repression has changed this fact. The very latest medical opinion is that transsexualism is a condition that begins in the womb.

I have always felt that I have a female soul. The most recent medical help I sought for my condition began in ... My Psychiatrist is Dr. ... He is happy to converse with you if feel it necessary. I've also been seeing Psychologist ... from the Gender Centre and an Endocrinologist ...

Growing Up

My Childhood etc. ... (Basic to the point)

My Journey

I have always felt I was female deep down. I began dressing in female attire when I was thirteen, but realised from about seventeen that my feelings ran a lot deeper and stronger. There were instances earlier in my childhood that, looking back, add weight to the fact that I have always had this condition.

My mother discovered that I cross-dressed when I was seventeen. At twenty, I told her that I wanted to transition but 'purged' when I was twenty-one, only to continue cross-dressing until I was nearly twenty-six. I then tried to repress all of my feelings and from around 1990 felt I had 'cured' myself. After many years of self-denial it took the events during the week of 11th September to make me realise that I needed to be true to myself, regardless of society's norms or my own fears.

In May 2003 I began dressing again and throughout 2004 I went out socially at least twice weekly and began building supportive networks of friends around me. From November 2004 I finally began the transitioning process. This involved seeing the doctors noted above and starting laser treatments to remove facial and body hair.

On my fortieth birthday (January 2005) I started a course of female hormones. In February 2005 I informed the rest of my nuclear family. I'm very lucky to have such open families, as they were all very understanding and supportive.

On moving to my new flat in late April 2005, I began to live as a female in all circumstances outside work.

Note to Company ...

I have been working at ... as an architectural draftsman for nearly ten years. I tell everyone of my passion for working for ... and how wonderful my co-workers are. I feel I have contributed significantly in (insert your achievements here).

I am sure that this happening will be out of a lot of people's comfort zones. I just wish it to be known that I feel my transitioning has been an unavoidable necessity in my life and none of this has been undertaken lightly.

Staff may need to be given training on what to expect (e.g. how to refer to me, toilet issues and anti-discrimination policies). At the time of my leave, a management email will be sent to all staff. A personal note will be attached by me to the co-workers that I usually deal with daily. At this time I will also begin changing my personal documentation to reflect my new status. I will then prepare to return to work, physically and in every way myself unmistakably - female.

... may need to prepare documents regarding this, should this become public knowledge.

After this workplace transition, my next action is to complete my laser treatments and commence speech therapy. I will also be saving in order to have gender reassignment surgery.

The second folder was titled 'Human Resources (H.R.) Specific U.S.A.' This contained a whole section from the 'coming-out at work' link I have on my links page (Gender Sanity - Guidelines for H.R. Professionals). It was brilliant. I also highlighted the sentences I thought important, such as the point they made about Lynn Conway, and the part entitled 'Antecedents of Workplace Transition'.

The third folder was titled 'H.R. Specific N.S.W.'. This contained H.R. information relating to the state of Australia I live in - New South Wales. I received this information from the Sydney Gender Centre. It also included a N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination Law brochure, and an

Anti-Discrimination policy document from my own work place, (highlighting that my company did not discriminate against Transgender people).

The Fourth folder division was a Case Study from a girl who had also transitioned on the job. I must make a special 'thank you' to Paula Kaye. Some of the information was invaluable. These can be seen in the documents informing my company's staff, which comes later.

The Fifth folder division included information concerning common misconceptions about transsexualism and 'Question and Answer' type documents aimed at helping understanding. Refer to the above Gender Centre link or just surf the transgender websites.

Lastly, the Sixth folder division contained a link to my website. I ensured that my website had photos of me dressed in work mode. Do not have rude photos on your website! Remember why you created your website. For me, it was an aid in my coming-out to the world.

Informing My Bosses.

My initial meetings went with hierarchy. I went first to my Agent, then Human Resources at my place of work and then my Department Head. I sat down with each (armed with a folder) and stated that I needed to say something that required complete confidentiality. I said that I had a medical condition known as gender dysphoria which meant that I was transitioning from being male to being female. I told them that I'd been taking hormones and that I've been living as a female full-time with the exception of work) for the past four months. I also stated how much passion I had working for the company and that I would still be exactly the same person, but will be merely presenting differently.

I then asked my Department Head (once she had time to digest the news herself and read my folder), to organise a meeting with the immediate bosses above me. She was to sit in on the meeting (with an H.R. representative also present) and then give me the power to speak to my bosses.

When the time came, she started proceedings with a brief introduction, stating that it was I who was to speak. Again I had my folders at the ready. I must say here that all of my upper management were wonderful and handled the situation very professionally. My bosses received the news well and my department head gave me a big vote of confidence. She concluded the meeting by stating to my bosses (with me presenting 'boy mode') that, "Stefanie has been with us for a long time. She has been very professional about this and has researched this thoroughly. How we will go about this workplace transition over the next few weeks is covered within this folder. We don't want to lose her skills."

My Department Head was already leading by example, modelling the desired office behaviour from the outset. I felt respected, empowered, in control and blessed. Thank you, from my heart.

Informing Staff

I'd timed this to perfection. In other words, I was finding it increasingly stressful and difficult to hide the wonderful changes that were happening to my body. I had informed my managers when negotiating my transition timeline, that I would be taking two weeks leave as at date. This leave was to help staff digest and gossip about the news.

I kept my impending 'holiday' on a low-key basis, but kept my mouth shut as to the real reason. If anyone were to 'pick' me, I was to take leave immediately. I did though make a joke to a close female work friend on my last day, saying that although I'd be spending my holiday at home this time, I might go to a health spa and come back "a completely different person!"

Various planning meetings took place with those in the know in the last week. On the Monday after I'd taken my leave, my department head got everyone on my floor together for a quick informal chat. Having assured them that it wasn't anything to do with their own jobs, she then informed them about me and that I had the full support of the company.

Emails were then sent to staff from upper management & H.R. The first was a dry 'statement of fact' letter. A more personal one drafted by me was then sent. It contained a link to my website and to select people, a few photos. Additional information was then sent (thanks Paula Kaye) covering toilet issues and a piece titled 'Having difficulty Seeing Stefanie as Female?'

Work based emails

Subject: Workplace Transition

Stephen Imbruglia is a transgender person currently in transition. Stephen is in the process of transitioning from being male to being female. This is a long-term process, but for staff in ..., the most visible aspect of this transition will be when Stephen returns to work. Stephen has requested that employees be informed of his transition prior to this date and it is also at his request that this internal memo be circulated.

Stephen will be taking leave, from 2nd September through to 18th September. When Stephen returns on Monday 19th September, his name will be Stefanie Imbruglia.

From this date forward all employees are required to call Stephen by his new name. References in terms of pronouns will also need to be adjusted. Stefanie will be referred to as she and her. Pronouns which are currently suitable to Stephen ('he' and 'him') will not be appropriate after the date of transition.

Stephen has worked for ... for almost ten years now and is a valuable employee.

This process is difficult and involved for Stephen. Stephen and the Management team will therefore

appreciate the support of employees. Under N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination legislation Stefanie will be entitled to use the bathrooms and other facilities provided for all female employees.

The management recognises that this is an area that staff may have questions about and are happy to provide information from the N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination Board on this subject. I will be happy to address any appropriate questions regarding Stephen's transition. Stephen has also indicated he is also happy to answer any questions you may have.

Our H.R. Policies ensure equal and fair opportunity for all prospective and existing employees.

Equality of opportunity is provided regardless of gender, marital status, physical, intellectual, psychological or psychiatric disability, race, colour, ethnicity, social origin, pregnancy, parental status, family responsibilities, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, transgender status, age, political conviction or trade union activity. We recognise employees solely on the basis of their abilities, aptitudes, performance, qualifications and skills.

We strive to maintain a workplace that ensures respect and dignity for all staff.

Some thoughts which may help dispel concerns regarding transgender workplace transition embarrassment at forgetting to use correct names, forms of address, etc.

This is entirely normal and only to be expected. It is common for people to sometimes temporarily forget someone's name or to accidentally call them by someone else's name. Stefanie is entirely understanding of what a big step this is for most people and how easy it is to forget new names or be uncertain or confused. She will not be affronted or embarrassed if this should occur during the first few days or on occasion at other times. Stefanie understands that her workplace transition is actually a joint transition in which everyone is learning to adjust to changes. She realises that understanding, tolerance, and plain old give-and-take are necessary for everyone. Stefanie will, especially during the first two or three weeks, be presenting herself in an unmistakably feminine style to assist others to adjust as quickly and easily as possible and to help avoid confusion.

Finding it difficult to see Stefanie as Female?

This is entirely normal and only to be expected. Stefanie has been perceived as male for quite some time so it is only to be expected that adjustments will also take some time. Everyone will find, however, that they soon adjust. As hormone, electrolysis/laser and speech therapy progress, Stefanie will become increasingly feminine in physical appearance and presentation.

Whatever typically male features may be perceived in Stefanie can all be found among genetic women (e.g. being tall, having facial hair, deeper voice, etc.). The best way staff can approach this aspect is to not focus on those features which they perceive to be male but instead to concentrate on Stefanie's essential qualities and/or more feminine features. Stefanie is entirely understanding of how challenging it can be for other people to change long-held perceptions. She understands that this is something which is not usually encountered and for which most people are not prepared. This next phase in her transitioning is though essential, as is insisting on her rights in relation to this matter. Her medical treatment and wellbeing are in part dependent on it.

Some facts which may dispel concerns regarding the use of toilets during transgender workplace transition.

In general there are no laws, Federal, State or local, governing who may use toilet facilities. It is not against any law for a male to use female toilets or vice versa. This is a matter of social custom only. There are only two laws in N.S.W. relating to the use of toilets; both form part of the N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination legislation.

Firstly, the *Anti-Discrimination Act N.S.W. 1977* states that it is illegal to deny the use of toilets of the preferred gender to transgender persons who have had sex reassignment surgery.

Secondly, the *Anti-Discrimination Act N.S.W. 1977* states that transgender persons who have not had sex reassignment surgery should be allowed to use the toilets of their preferred gender unless it can be proven in a court of law that this would be unreasonable in all circumstances. The only cases where this has been satisfactorily proven have been in relation to women's refuges.

Transgender persons are required by the Medical Standards of Care to live in their preferred gender in all respects for a period of at least one year (subject to the discretion of their health care professionals) before sex reassignment surgery will be approved. This requirement means that Transgender persons must use the toilets of their preferred gender.

Also, in relation to the above, since it is necessary for transgender persons to present themselves at all times as their preferred gender, it would be very confronting to others as well as embarrassing and demeaning to the transgender person to insist that they use the toilets of their physical sex. It could also be very dangerous for the transgender person to do so.

Transgender persons have a deep-seated (possibly of physical neurological origin) sense of their perceived gender being their true gender. They generally find it very distressing to have to use the toilets pertaining to their physical sex.

It is becoming increasingly common all over the world to now use public and corporate unisex toilets facilities. Two examples of this in N.S.W. are the Sydney Eye Hospital and Bondi Junction Railway Station.

It has always been common practice in domestic households where toilet facilities are located in bathrooms for family members of both genders to be in the room at the same time while those toilet facilities are being used. The use of toilet facilities in women's toilets is entirely private. Only the washing and drying of hands is conducted in public.

Employees who feel uncomfortable with sharing the toilet with Stefanie can always delay their visit until she has left or use another toilet until such time as discomfort is allayed.

Stefanie is entirely understanding of how challenging this might be for some people, how this situation is one which is not usually encountered, and for which most people are not prepared. Stefanie will not be taking offence at anyone who may display or express some concern or discomfort.

Stefanie is prepared to cooperate fully with management in resolving any issues regarding this aspect of her workplace transition. However, she will be ultimately insisting on her rights in this matter as her medical treatment and wellbeing are in part dependent on it.

The following is a note from Stefanie Imbruglia about her transition. Stefanie has asked that I circulate this prior to her return to work so staff can better understand her decision. Please circulate as required.

Thanks

Hi Everyone,

Life is interesting isn't it?

I have felt so comfortable working around you. It is a lovely place to work, but it is the people here which I feel make it so special. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank ... from Human Resources and also ... All have been very understanding and have dealt with this situation in a very professional, respectful and positive manner.

I am sure the fact that this is happening will be out of a lot of your comfort zones. I just wish it to be known that I feel my transitioning has been an unavoidable necessity in my life. None of this has been undertaken lightly. I actually nearly began transitioning when I was twenty-one but the timing wasn't right. I now feel ready for what lies ahead. I know this must have come as a big shock to you all. Gender Dysphoria is a medical condition and the latest scientific opinion is that it begins in the womb. Stefanie is who I am inside and it's something I've had to deal with my whole life. I have fought it, denied it and tried to 'cure' it. An event (more accurately, it was an entire week of events) had such an impact on me psychologically, that I finally, finally allowed myself to be me. That was the week of 11th September 2001.

I will still be the same happy, positive person that you all know. I am merely changing my physical-self to better reflect who I really am. I am being totally honest to everybody in my life and only ask that you be yourselves around me. My entire family have been very supportive and positive, as have my friends and acquaintances. More than anything, I am the happiest that I've ever been in my life. To accept yourself for who you are is amazingly empowering. I look forward to catching up with you again soon.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.