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Ellie Angell: My first three months as a trans person in the workplace

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"One of the best things that TrinityP3 did was to ask me for a one-pager – setting me up as a stakeholder in my own individual journey as a trans woman."

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By **Ellie Angell**, business director at **TrinityP3**

About three months ago, I made the decision to affirm my gender to my professional network. It was, as you can probably imagine, a difficult thing for me to do. A heart in the mouth moment. It was also one of the final steps in my social transition.

I've been reflecting on the last three months; about what it means to be trans in our industry, and what my hopes are for the future. Below are some reflections, but I'd like to say upfront that this article is purely about my professional experience. There is a lifelong personal story that sits behind the last three months. None of that is appropriate for here.

Acceptance and freedom: The first days

Unsurprisingly, the last three months have been emotional. They've also been liberating. They've been fascinating, as I've talked to so many people kind enough to reach out to me. And they've been eye-opening, as I've engaged with a number of organisations keen to just have a conversation about how they incorporate gender diversity (in the context of trans people or people identifying as non-binary) in a positive way, to the relevant parts of their DE&I or people policies and approaches.

Both within the organisation I work with (TrinityP3) and across the wider community, I've been largely met with beautiful acceptance. Affirmation brings acceptance, which leads to greater affirmation: it's a virtuous circle which brings a freedom of thought and expression in the workplace that I've simply never had before, and that I'm still getting the hang of.

Learning and sharing: The next weeks

Acceptance and freedom are wonderfully affirming feelings, but in practical terms, they've opened a lot of conversations with professional contacts that I'd never had.

In the process of these communications, I've learnt a lot.



I've realised just how much willingness there is in our industry to embrace diversity. This isn't a huge surprise to me, knowing the industry as I do, but I want to congratulate us. We beat ourselves up a lot as an industry, we talk a lot about what's wrong, but I want to take a moment and recognise something that's so right.

Trust me when I tell you that professional acceptance, to a trans person, is absolutely not a given. Stories abound about trans people in other professions forced out of careers, actively discriminated against, compelled to take desperate measures in order to live.

I had to take this risk. I truly feel blessed by the reaction I've received.

The trans knowledge base is low, but there are no stupid questions

I've also learnt how low the knowledge base regarding trans people actually is. And this is absolutely on me. Being trans myself means I naturally have a high level of understanding, and I had to quickly burst my own bubble, let my assumptions evaporate, and remember that the large majority of people don't actively think about the topic until they're confronted with it.

DEAL OR NO DEAL IS UP 26%

Source: OATM, 5 City Metro, 6-6:30pm M-F, Consolidated 7

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What's worse, when people are confronted with it, it is often via the media – which focuses on polarised rhetoric to generate clickbait.

Therefore, in the news, trans issues are so often negative, so often extremist, so often charged, in any number of directions, pro or anti. I am, theoretically, a member of a minority and threatened group of people, although I try not to think or feel like that.

But to any reasonable person looking for sensible opinions, the news can be next to useless, and part of my experience in outreach has been fielding questions from intelligent, well-meaning people that truly surprised me in a 'didn't you know that?' kind of way (and that, as I say, is on me, not them). It has been so useful – to me, and hopefully to the people asking.

And in the kind and lovely people I've spoken with, there is such willingness to learn.

It's okay that this feels complex – we're all learning

Understanding the nuances and complexities of what it is to be trans in life and how it applies to the workplace – the social and medical logistics involved, the steps that need to be taken, the differences in individual journeys, the spectrum of what diverse gender identity represents, the sensitive areas of communication, unconscious bias, and more – is an area which, I believe based on what I've seen, needs some attention. Not for lack of trying, simply for lack of experience and knowledge.

One of the best things that TrinityP3 did was to ask me for a one-pager on 'How We Roll With Ellie'. In doing so, they set me up as a stakeholder in my own individual journey as a trans woman in the professional world, they acknowledged their own lack of exposure and willingness to learn, they allowed me to immediately bust some myths and put people at ease with me, rather than treading on eggshells, and they didn't wholly rest on me fitting myself into detailed policies (as important as such policies are).

In this way, I was able to suggest that we practice 'sensitive sharing' – talking about me with others outside of the company when it comes up, but not to sensationalise or for gossip.

I was able to say that 'common sense rules' – I am open to lots of questions or none at all, and nothing is stupid. Simply use the same common sense as for anyone else when considering what is appropriate or inappropriate to ask.

I was able to set the 'expectation that I expect mistakes', especially from people who've known me 10 years – mistakes in pronouns, my name, how I'm referred to or things I'm asked – and that there's no need for anyone to beat themselves up or be uncomfortable with that, as we all get used to each other.

I was able to talk a bit about clients – essentially, it's business as usual and while we don't anticipate issues, the internal no-arsehole rule applies in the same way as with anything else.

And finally, perhaps most importantly, I was able to state my wish that things are normalised over time. I don't want or need to be a constant topic of conversation. We'll all still agree and disagree and kiss and punch and get great shit done for our clients and each other, as we always have.

Having everyone read this plain English, simple one-pager has been so useful in short-circuiting many of the anticipated challenges of acclimatisation, for them and for me.

It's super-important for me to say that I'm not here to constantly wave a flag. Or to say that trans issues should dominate anyone's agenda. There are lots of other equally important things to work through. And I am well aware that DE&I is a much, much bigger topic.

Having said that, I'm here to tell you that there is a high likelihood – actually a near-certainty – that there will be trans or gender-diverse people in our industry right now, who have not revealed themselves. Who are having to mask their identity and live double lives. Who are struggling with themselves, as I did. It is for these people that I write this article, that I talk with organisations, that I am, at least for now, on a little platform.

The numbers say there are others struggling out there

Reliable data is hard to come by, but different sources I've seen claim that the general trans population tends to sit between 1-3% (I am talking about trans men and women, and people identifying as non-binary; I am excluding children).

Nowhere near that proportion of people in our industry are outwardly affirmed. It stands to reason that you've probably met a trans or gender-diverse person in the workplace, either yours or in others, without knowing it. Hell, before three months ago, many of you met me.

I would love for organisations to be as conscious as possible – even more than they already are – to become more attuned to the nuances, to have those hidden individuals feel truly enabled to free themselves, or confide in someone, or think again about the possibility of affirming themselves, if that's what they dream of doing.

And ultimately, I would love for things to be affirmed to the point where there is literally no issue left. Where no-one is fazed. Where articles like this are redundant.

To all organisations, I say – if you want to talk to someone with lived experience, my door is open.

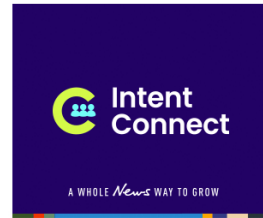
To those people struggling, I say – leaving personal challenges aside (which are, of course, a separate thing entirely) it is possible, in our industry, to affirm yourself in your own gender. It truly is. And we should all celebrate that.

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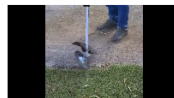
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Walt Disney will cut its investment in programming for traditional television networks pretty dramatically as the company navigates the consumer shift to streaming, Chief Executive [Bob Iger](#) said on Wednesday, reports Reuters' [Lisa Richwine](#).

Iger said linear channels such as ABC still serve as an important marketing tool and reach older viewers who are not watching series such as *Abbott Elementary* on Disney's

