

# 4 LGBTQ+ TED TALKS TO CHALLENGE YOUR CULTURE OF INCLUSIVITY

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Diversity means bringing people of different identities together. But how do you help them connect? It starts with a conversation, as these 4 TED talks from the LGBTQ+ community make clear.

## Conversation changes culture

When businesses undergo a cultural transformation, they leave behind one identity and move towards another. Chances are, the existing culture isn't working for them — perhaps it's stifling productivity or causing rifts between teams. Perhaps there's homophobia or transphobia flowing through your organization, too.

HR teams face a significant challenge in extracting deep-rooted prejudices and helping businesses change shape. The processes and policies that exclude LGBTQ+ employees are often not the results of genuine antipathy, but of lack of thought, consideration, and exposure.

Is gender still a two-box answer on your job application forms, for example? And how relevant is gender to the role you're recruiting for, anyway?

## LGBTQ+ needs: if we don't ask, we won't know

We're all still learning — that's the good news. It's okay to have made mistakes in the past. What matters now is facing up to our failures and trying again. With greater thought, consideration, and exposure to the needs and lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, organizations can move the dial on inclusivity.

And the best way to see the world through another person's eyes? You listen to them talk.

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## LGBTQ+ TED speakers share their stories of inclusion

### Jackson Bird — How to talk (and listen) to transgender people

"Being trans is awkward", Jackson says in his opening minute.

And that awkwardness wasn't just an internal feeling for him, before he started his transition. But it played out in his personal relationships, too. "People who support me and all other trans people wholeheartedly are often so scared to say the wrong thing, so embarrassed to not know what they think they should, that they never ask."



The lesson for us as business leaders and culture shapers? Just ask. What pronoun would you like to go by? Which bathroom would you feel most comfortable using today? And will you tell me if that changes in the future? These are potentially awkward questions to ask the first time, but they are essential when building a culture of diversity and inclusion.

### 2. David Fleischer — How to fight prejudice through policy conversations

David Fleischer has used his career as a community organizer to answer the question: "What would it take to make people less prejudiced?"



His TED talk shares the results of 15,000+ doorstep conversations across Los Angeles, where campaigners talked one-on-one for 10 minutes with voters about LGBTQ+ rights in the LA area.

## "Talking leads to empathy, and empathy is the antidote to bias"

What happened? 10% of the conversations resulted in a long-lasting, measurable shift in voter opinion; becoming more welcoming, understanding, and empathetic towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Fleischer admits that while 10% is a modest change, it's a really great start. And his campaign is a testament to the power of authentic, human conversation. Watch the TED talk in full to see a campaigner, Virginia, handle a potentially difficult conversation with a prejudiced voter, with skill and grace.

What could a 10% shift in opinion in your organization achieve?

### 3. Fahed Saeed — The importance of using inclusive language

Do acronyms like "LGBTQ+" empower inclusivity, or do they risk pigeonholing people and segregating them further? This is the question Fahed Saeed poses in his TED talk.

As a gay, Muslim man, Saeed has experienced the struggle of "inherent contradictions" in the intersectionality of his identity — being gay and Muslim isn't an easy mix.

**"Intersectionality is the theory of how different identity factors overlap and how different systems of discrimination are related to these factors"**

— Fahed Saeed, quoting Kimberlé Crenshaw

He argues that the identity "boxes" we are put in limit who we are able to become: if you're gay, you can't be Muslim. If you're a mother, you can't lead a business. If you're a man, you can't be a stay-at-home Dad, and so on. That's the everyday reality of intersectionality discrimination.

Asking the audience to assign themselves 3 identity factors — gender, relationship status, nationality, job description, etc — and then choose just the one to live by, Saeed illustrates how frustrating it feels to be minimized down to one of your many, valuable character traits.

## So coming back to "LGBTQ+": does assigning this label lift a person up or hold them back?

Saeed would argue the latter, although he acknowledges that having a community is very important, too.

Saeed's message has a clear application in the workplace: don't let an employee's gender, sexuality, nationality, or any other one identity factor define them.



Don't assume that two gay colleagues have anything more in common than their sexuality. One might like soccer, the other likes theatre. We're all made up of a myriad of different values, interests, and characteristics. Remember this when you're onboarding new team members, and make sure their colleagues respect their individual differences, too.

Because in Saeed's words, in trying to build a "majority community", we risk erasing the overlapping nuances that make us human.

Through conversation we find out we are all so much more.

### 4. Ash Beckham 'We're all hiding something. Let's find the courage to open up'

Self-identifying as a "militant lesbian" at times, Beckham's had her fair share of "hard conversations".

When a 4-year-old asked if she was a boy or a girl, Beckham admits she was "ready to fight". But instead of losing her cool, she spoke directly, authentically, and unapologetically saying "Heg, I know it's kind of confusing. My hair is short like a boy's, and I wear boy's clothes, but I'm a girl".

This led Beckham to develop a three-point process for managing hard conversations — no matter what they might be. It might be telling someone you love them for the first time, announcing that you're pregnant, or saying you have cancer. These are all "closets" in Beckham's mind. And to break out of those closets, we need to:

- 1. Be authentic
- 2. Stay direct
- 3. Remain unapologetic

What does this mean at work? It means tackling hard conversations head-on and backing up your words with improved policies to support and protect the rights of LGBTQ+ employees.

**"Be real with each other [...] and be ready for real in return".**

If you aren't sure how best to represent a LGBTQ+ worker, be honest about your shortcomings and ask for help. If you hear of discriminatory behavior, don't stand for it. Don't apologize for not standing for it, either.

## Talk, share, then make change

Words have power. But actions speak even louder.

Hopefully, these TED talks have inspired and incentivized you to reassess your organization's approach to LGBTQ+. Are you empowering employees or limiting them? Are you asking for, and listening to, their needs or filling in the blanks yourself?

**Change your behavior first and the rest of your team will follow.**

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