

# OUT IN INSURANCE: Celebrating Pride Month

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For me, becoming a proud gay man was hard won and coming out in my professional life was an equally arduous journey. Not so long ago, I wouldn't have written this essay celebrating Pride Month and shared it publicly.



During the formative years of my life and career, I pushed my authentic self deep from my conscious awareness. In my early twenties, I married a Bermudian woman, and we had two children, Liam (19) and Grace (17). I consider myself privileged to be their father; they're remarkable kids. I set about building my career in Bermuda's burgeoning re/insurance industry in the early 2000's. Across cubicles, I'd overhear passing comments by colleagues questioning my sexuality. I tried to outrun the speculation and threw myself into my work, trying to pursue professional success as a deflection.

Insurance was considered socially conservative by conventional wisdom. While I triumphantly reached self-acceptance and came out in my personal life, my path to doing so professionally remained littered with anxiety. I was deeply afraid that being open about this core part of my identity would lead to judgment, marginalization, or outright rejection. I feared losing my livelihood and the reputation that I had worked hard to build. My leadership and coworkers knew me as an ostensibly straight,

recently-divorced man with a family, so how could I come out to them? I kept my voice deep, my shirts well-ironed, and my head down.

My company transferred me to New York City, and the move focused a spotlight on the disconnect between my personal and professional life. I looked at my boyfriend (now husband) and saw his ease with being unequivocally himself in the publishing industry. Friends were confused by my hesitation to be out at work. I envied them. I considered leaving insurance. Yet, I saw purpose in my chosen industry: insurance helps businesses, communities, and individuals be more resilient and recover from setbacks. I persisted.

My early steps were tentative. I took to carefully studying the room. Some colleagues I came out to, some I didn't. I regret there's likely former colleagues reading this that I never came out to; I can only offer that I wish I was then who I am now.

In the 2010's, I found myself at my company's holiday party. A close colleague spontaneously outed me to a senior executive, Greg Hendrick. His response was surprisingly nonchalant and immediately accepting. I have profound gratitude to Greg for that moment. He may not remember, but it had a tremendous impact on me. One of my greatest professional fears was allayed, and I set a new trajectory toward being proudly out in the workplace. It's not by chance that I recently joined the start-up that Greg co-founded and report to him today.

I went on to chair a LGBTQ+ employee resource group, one of few in the industry at the time. A young man just starting his career joined us. I vividly recall his transformation from a reserved colleague flying under the radar to an outgoing participant in our workplace. Seeing him smiling and laughing with co-workers warmed my heart. Leaders take note: writ large on that unleashed smile was the toll that "covering" an essential part of

one's identity imposes on an individual and their contributions to a company.

Still, the road from that holiday party wasn't always smooth. I found that I needed to continuously come out and as I wove the fabric of my career, a thread could be pulled from the other end that unraveled my progress. Unwittingly, I stumbled into darker corridors of the industry to discover that the workplace could be outright hostile. Even in organizations that professed their LGBTQ+ inclusivity and served rainbow bagels during Pride Month to display their cultural competency, their rank-and-file's prejudice and insensitivity lurked beneath the surface:

- Planning a hospitality event, a peer told me that a gay team member was an inappropriate choice for managing the reception desk because of his demeanor.
- Leaving a late-night work event, a senior salesperson garnered laughs by shouting after me to meet him in his hotel room.
- Networking with colleagues, an executive pointedly asked if my position was top or bottom, "in wrestling, of course."

Those moments no longer struck at my core. I chose how to respond. And for every ignorant person or (un)intended micro-aggression, I had more colleagues and friends who valued and supported me.

Being true to myself was essential to my career advancement. Today, I'm happily at Vantage Risk, a specialty re/insurer formed in 2020. The company embraces differences as a competitive strength. And they mean it. From the get-go, Vantage adopted "We're better together" as one of its core values. I feel that value in practice every day, and I've found a welcome home and sense of belonging among my 250 colleagues. In our bright and growing corner of the insurance industry, we're an incredibly diverse bunch across gender, race, cultures, age, and sexual orientation.

There has been tremendous progress in corporate America over the last few decades in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), yet there's still more to do. In my estimation, two areas call for closer attention:

- 1) LGBTQ+ self-identification programs are far and few between, resulting in a DEIB blind spot for companies. In business, what we don't measure rarely gets leadership attention. Tracking recruitment, retention, and promotions and offering development opportunities and targeted benefits becomes a non-starter.
- 2) LGBTQ+ representation on Fortune 500 Boards is abysmally low at ~0.6% and has only increased ~0.1% over the last five years (Source: The Association of LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors). After a robust debate among our actuaries about these statistics and appropriate formulas to calculate when LGBTQ+ board members will parallel the 7.2% of U.S. population, I'll venture to say that entire civilizations will rise and fall. (And I ask forgiveness of my mathematically-inclined brethren for leaning into poetic flourish versus figures.)

In the seats of economic power, a lack of insight and underrepresentation passively allows the marginalization of LGBTQ+ people to persist. Individually, those of us who aspire to join the C-Suite or sit on boards are disadvantaged by long-entrenched structural inequalities. Simply not good enough.

In the spirit of Pride being both a call-to-arms and celebration, I'd like to end with recognition that what's past is prologue. The changes that I've experienced across my lifetime and professional career have been monumental. There may be challenges that persist and even setbacks to overcome, but I'm optimistic about the potential of what's ahead.

Happy Pride.

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