

PRIDE: Progress & Continuing the Fight

By Cile Johnson, Co-Founder, Talent Dimensions



It's Pride Month, and I've watched with amazement and gratitude as communities and organizations have stepped up their support for the LGBTQ+ community over the last couple of decades.

I am one of many members of this community who have gone from a very deep and dark closet to living a life I never expected some 3+ decades ago. It is one with much less fear (and, of course, that's relative given the state of this right now) and the opportunity to experience a life most people would consider normal. I no longer live two separate lives; I am married, which brings a host of financial and legal rights, and I finally feel like I can bring my whole and best self to every aspect of my life...I belong.

However, as I write this article, I realize that we live in a world where division is the norm and not the exception. Politics, media, extreme groups and others are amplifying messages that are tearing down the basic tenets of humanity. As we celebrate Pride this year, we need to acknowledge and celebrate the progress we've made while recognizing the sobering fact that the fight for LGBTQ+ equality is far from over.

In 2023, at least 510 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced in state legislatures across the United States, which nearly tripled the number from 2022, according to the ACLU. Educa-

tion and health care were the primary targets of these bills, which included bans on accessing gender-affirming care for transgender youth and regulating curricula in public schools and universities.

By the end of 2023, 84 anti-LGBTQ+ laws had been enacted across 23 states, including 15 banning gender-affirming care for trans youth, and seven allowing the misgendering of trans students, according to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

The challenges go far beyond new legislation as workplace discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees remains widespread. A study by UCLA's Williams Institute found that 45.5% reported unfair treatment, including being fired or harassed due to their identity at some point in their careers. They also found that more than one-third of LGBTQ+ employees said they left a job during their lifetime due to treatment by their employer based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Despite efforts made by many organizations to create safe and inclusive cultures, these numbers are just too high.

Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and rhetoric have consequences for all members of the LGBTQ+ community, and those consequences are heightened by those who are most vulnerable. A 2023 Trevor Project survey found that 86% of transgender and non-binary youth said

that recent debates around anti-trans bills have negatively impacted their mental health, with 55% saying it impacted them "very negatively." That same survey revealed that 41% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including half of transgender and non-binary youth. While I don't have children, I have 12 nieces and nephews. The thought of any one of them considering life too unbearable to live is unfathomable. No child should be the target of hate and grow up with fear, shame and the inability to be who they are.

These are staggering statistics, and they illustrate the need to keep up the good fight. I want to thank the many organizations and individuals that get up every morning and do just that...fight. There are recent examples of where the fight may be gaining momentum, and many are cautiously optimistic that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation may be losing steam. In Georgia, a series of these bills did not pass and never made it to a vote, despite the make-up of the majorities in both chambers. The same was true in Florida, where 21 of 22 anti-LGBTQ+ bills failed, and in Kentucky, where no bills passed. We need to celebrate these victories and continue the fight for more.

My colleagues and I help organizations create cultures where ALL their employees

can achieve a sense of belonging. According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow, belonging is the 3rd fundamental human need after physiological and safety needs, and it is something we ALL want and need. We go about it in many ways, but we believe education leads to conversations that ultimately result in dialogue. It's this dialogue that creates an opening where the possibilities exist for shifting mindsets and perspectives. When we create that opening and begin to see the world and life experiences through the eyes of someone else, especially someone we don't understand, that's when we can tap into our humanity.



Cile Johnson is co-founder and Chief Business Officer at Talent Dimensions. She is a passionate advocate for driving organizational performance through the development of people...all people. Talent Dimension focuses on helping organizations create cultures where individuals can achieve a sense of belonging by leveraging all aspects of the talent management continuum.