

Out & Equal ERG Roundtable Series First in Series – Notes

Thursday, June 11 | 1pm – 4pm

Haworth Showroom

555 Mission St, 19th Floor | San Francisco

Prop 8 and Beyond: ERG Successes and Challenges. *Moderated by Stephen Gould, Out & Equal Alexis McKeown, Chair, Barclays Global Investors Out Network (BGION)*
Howard Solomon, Chair, Gays, Lesbians and Friends at Sun Microsystems (GLAF@Sun)
Hilary Ware, Managing Litigation Counsel, Google and Google Gaygler member

The three panelists spoke about the individual experiences and outcomes at their organizations. For Google, they were able to quickly turn around an *amicus* brief supporting marriage equality. They were able to understand the issue as an equal rights question for their employees, rather than a “social” or political issue. For them, Hilary noted that it was also an easy business case, which allowed Google to be seen quite favorably with current and potential LGBT employees, at no cost to the company, financial or otherwise.

Sun Microsystems did not have a process to pull a statement on a legislative issue from the company. Once the election had passed, the company and the ERG was able to look at what processes needed to be put into place to allow an issue as this get highlighted by the ERG leadership, and processed to the appropriate decision makers. This outcome now applies to any group at Sun, so that they can now be more nimble at responding to a need to support legislation that affects their employees.

At Barclay’s, an effort was made to help bring other San Francisco ERGs together in order to raise funds to defeat Proposition 8 in California. What was learned, that with the election as the biggest issue, any efforts, even if through a 501c3, could not in good faith be seen as anything but lobbying efforts, which from which most companies shied away. A lesson that was learned was to build and strengthen relationships and support educational and outreach efforts in the LGBT non-profit community, such as those with Out & Equal, so that they will re-enforce any efforts that may go forward during a contentious election issue.

Moving Ahead: Advice from the Experts. *Moderated by Anthony Bannon, Out & Equal Tita Gray, Principal Manager for Diversity & Inclusion, PG&E*
Helga Ying, Director, Worldwide Government Affairs & Public Policy, Levi Strauss & Company

Helga and Tita each spoke about the efforts at Levi’s and PG&E, respectively, on how their companies came out to support marriage equality. For Helga, in government affairs, it was an easy argument that not only aligned with the company’s values of equality and opportunity for their employees, but from a competitive standpoint, the business case for marriage equality supported a need to recruit, retain and be cost-effective for all their employees in California. They were able to turn around an *amicus* brief to support marriage equality, joining Out & Equal, in 2007. Hoping that other companies would follow

their lead, they were surprised to see that they stood alone in the forefront at that time. Helga stressed that it is an equal rights, rather than a social/political, issue.

Through their public affairs office, Tita reported that PG&E also relied on its history of supporting equal treatment for all employees, by giving \$250,000 to defeat Prop 8. Also hoping to bring other companies on board, they stood alone, joined by only a few, on marriage equality. Once the company made this commitment, they also leveraged their LGBT employee resource group to bring visibility and voluntarism to the issue.

At the end, Helga and Tita offered some advice for ERG and LGBT community leaders:

1. Get your corporate social responsibility office involved early. If the company is already supporting an LGBT non-profit, leverage that relationship to activate LGBT non-profit leaders to call your CEO or decision makers to supply the business case and rationale for supporting legislation. Have your ERG ready to support that case.
2. While “going to the top” embrace the grassroots. Have all your ERG membership, including “straight” allies, write letters/emails/calls for support on an issue.
3. Even if your company does not include benchmarks of LGBT identity of its employees, use your ERG membership as a proxy number to show at least how many of your employees will be *directly affected* by any pending legislation.
4. Know your company’s culture and where you have pushback. Start your education campaign early. Find your advocates and build a cross-functional team, including decision makers, who can mobilize when needed.
5. And lastly, in a note to the LGBT activist and advocacy community: give time to your corporate partners. Understand that signing statements and *amicus* briefs require processes which can take at least 6 weeks or more. Connect with your corporate partners early.

**Save the Date! The next regional event in the ERG Roundtable series will be
Thursday, August 27, 2009 at Sun Microsystems in Menlo Park.**

About the Out & Equal Roundtable Series

The purpose of the Roundtable series is to bring LGBT employee resource group leaders together to learn and share on specific topics and strategy on key ERG issues, and to help foster networking and communication between ERGs. The first series is presented as a national-regional joint effort between Out & Equal Workplace Advocates and Out & Equal San Francisco Bay Area.