



Say It Loud!

How has sharing your LGBTQ+ identity with colleagues or clients impacted your career or professional experience?



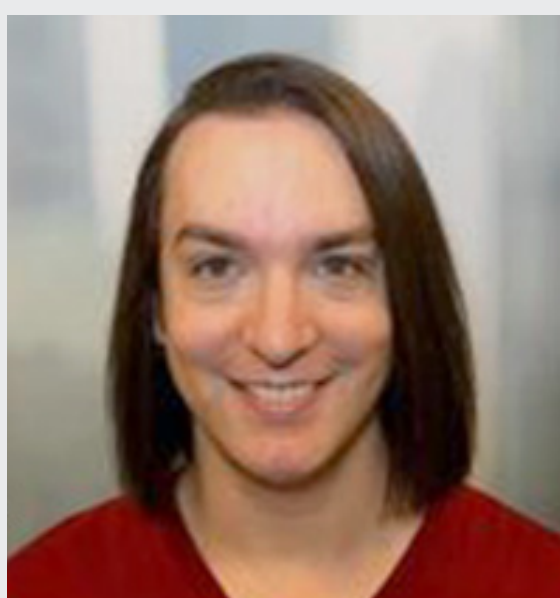
Brian Breheny
Partner, SEC Reporting and Compliance / Washington, D.C.

When I arrived at my first law firm, I wasn't out, in part because I hadn't yet accepted my sexuality. Thankfully, after three or four years there, I befriended a summer associate, and the same night he came out to me, I said to him, "I think I'm gay, too." Nobody knew, nobody expected it. When I finally told my family, my dad hinted that maybe I shouldn't tell people at the office. He asked, "Will that impact your career?" I said, "Frankly, it might, but this is who I am." Sometimes it's difficult to be your true self, and sometimes there are costs. But the rewards are so much better. Who wants to live in a closet? It was very important to me to find a firm where I could be myself. Despite my dad's worries, I think being gay has actually opened doors for me at Skadden — joining the LGBTQ+ Affinity Network, hosting events and connecting with other out attorneys and allies has enriched my professional experience.

Bringing my authentic self to my career, both as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and as a Black American born to immigrant parents, has required courage and resilience. It has also been a source of strength, pushing me to demonstrate that I am more than the labels society tries to assign to me. There have been times when I've felt I needed not only to be good but "better than" in order to be seen and given a fair chance. But I'm fortunate to have worked for nearly 30 years in an environment that supports me for who I am and my dedication to my work. I also appreciate the sacrifices that were made by others who helped carve a path long before I came along. I try to honor their efforts by giving back through various nonprofits and hopefully supporting others on their journeys.



Vaughn Burke Le Duc Safarov
Chief Human Resources Officer / New York



Sloan Grenz
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Project Supervisor / New York

After about five years at Skadden, I left to teach public school for three years. It was interesting to experience being an out man at Skadden, go into public education — where it's an unspoken rule that you should remain in the closet — and then return to the Firm, where it was once again safe to be out. The difference was remarkable. To have to hide a part of yourself is not only nerve-racking, it's impractical. I would have to change pronouns when telling somebody about my weekend or alter facts when relaying a personal anecdote that was relevant to my lesson. The energy I spent closeting myself could have been expended on my actual job. When I returned to Skadden, it was a relief to be someplace so welcoming and inclusive again. I am able to do better work because the Firm has always allowed me to be exactly who I am.

One of the qualities I love about Skadden is how well I get to know all the amazing people I work with. I know my colleagues' spouses and children, their hobbies and where they go on vacation. People have a richer professional life if they're working shoulder-to-shoulder with people they're friendly with and vice versa. Sharing my LGBTQ+ identity has allowed me to be my authentic self at work and enabled my colleagues to get to know me and my family the same way I'm familiar with them and theirs. It's led to more fulfilling relationships than I would have had if I'd kept an integral piece of who I am siloed away and off limits.



Jessica Hough
Partner, Tax / Washington, D.C.



Andrew Karp
Associate, Mass Torts, Insurance and Consumer Litig. / New York

When first joining Skadden, I noticed the number of LGBTQ+ lawyers in leadership positions, one of whom has since become a great friend and mentor. I have no doubt that our close relationship has been made possible by the fact that we are both comfortable being out at work. In fact, when my fiancé and I got engaged, this partner traveled "all the way to Brooklyn" with his husband to take us out to dinner and celebrate. Connections with others are so much stronger when you can be your true and authentic self.

Coming out doesn't happen all at once — it happens over and over. I have approached it in law school and now at Skadden from both social and citizenship perspectives. Socially, I just allow the information to naturally arise in conversations, rather than make a grand announcement. Although being gay is a really important part of my identity, it's just one of the many parts that makes me, me. From a citizen's perspective, I take active roles in different LGBTQ+ organizations. At Skadden, I'm a steering committee member of the LGBTQ+ Affinity Network. It's a great way for members to interact, share our experiences and find new opportunities to support our diverse attorneys.



Matt Rayburn
Associate, M&A / New York



Jordan Schwartz
Counsel, Mass Torts, Insurance and Consumer Litig. / Washington, D.C.

Coming out to my family was very challenging, so I was grateful for the support that I received at Skadden. My experience at the Firm played an instrumental role in my coming out in a healthy and supportive way. My colleagues were incredibly understanding of my taking time to deal with family and personal challenges that arose during that process. I subsequently joined the Firm's LGBTQ+ Affinity Network and Diversity Committee, which have become two of the most important aspects of my professional career. These groups have given me opportunities to hone my leadership skills, meet and recruit diverse attorneys, and promote diversity-related *pro bono* matters.

I came out 10 years before starting at Skadden, so I've had some practice being out, even at work. Being honest in my identity, which includes my sexuality, has been impactful on my professional and personal health because I get to live the truth. I do not take on the effort of putting on a mask, hiding or lying. We don't stop being people at the office, even as corporate attorneys. We spend so much time at work — expending any effort not being oneself misdirects energy that could be spent on work itself or on self-care. Getting to share who I am in the way straight people have been able to helps even the playing field and helps me engage in, and at, work.



Stefane Victor
Associate, Tax / Washington, D.C.



Laura Westfall
Counsel, Executive Compensation and Benefits / New York

In law school, I was co-founder and president of my school's LGBTQ+ affinity group. I wanted to put that credential on my resume because I was proud of it. My job counselor suggested that I take that language off because it would automatically label me as LGBTQ+ and might cost me job opportunities. I didn't take that advice. If there were people who wouldn't give me an interview because I put that credential on my resume, then that was a sacrifice I was willing to make. I didn't want to work at a law firm where I had to hide that in order to land a job interview.