**The Art of Inclusion Episode 2 – Out in the Open**

**Speakers: Andrew Maxwell, Aram Hosie, Mark Latchford**

**FULL TRANSCRIPT**

Aram: I think I just sent him an email saying, "Hi, I've got something I need to talk to you about." And then, like I had quite a good working relationship with him, so that helped. And then I definitely walked in to that meeting with the things I'd found on the internet to help explain what is trans person and what happens. And my conversation with him was about, it was just before I'd started taking hormones and so it was saying to him, "This is going to clearly mean I change in the workplace and so I'd rather tell you and be clear in the workplace about what's happening, rather than I start changing and people start kind of gossiping, so this is happening and I wanted to tell you and now what do we do?" I kind of didn't really have any better answers than he did.

Andrew: That's Aram, recalling the conversation he had with his manager when he told him that he was transitioning. As he said, neither he nor his boss had all of the answers. We hope to explore some of those answers today, because while the LGBTIQ plus community has come a long way in the last 30 years, there's still lots to do for its trans and gender diverse members, especially when it comes to work.

I'm Andrew Maxwell, and I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of this land. To the elders past, present and emerging, on whose country this recording is taking place. This is the Art of Inclusion, a podcast from Diversity Council Australia or DCA. In this six-part series, we peer in to the lives of fascinating people, whose stories shed light on the wider social issues facing Australia today. We flip the script on who we include, who we don't, and how we can all do better.

In this episode we talk to [Aram Hosie]. He's got a unique perspective on gender and work. He talks to us about his experience of pronouns, dealing with people's views on bathrooms and the differences between gender identity and gender expression.

Aram: So I'm Aram Hosie. Who I am, that depends on the day, probably, and what hat I'm wearing, but my day job I work as the Executive of Public Affairs at cohealth, but I also had the privilege of serving on the ministerial LGBTI taskforce here in Victoria. At various points I've sat on a few different boards and done a few different governancy things as well. I very much recognise my experience as a binary presenting trans person who's also white and also comes from a particular kind of education and a socioeconomic status that’s different to others. This is my experience, my perspective, but I absolutely cannot speak for everyone.

Trans peoples’ experiences tend to sit in one of two buckets. There's the kind of, "I always knew," folks, and they're often, they're the ones who we see presenting through a children's services who from when they're three or four of five, they're super clear on their gender identity and want to do something about that. And then there's our sleep leaders, don't work it out until later and then when you look back in retrospect, you go, "Oh, all of these things now make sense but I hadn't put it together at the time."

For me, ironically, it was when I had a medical thing. I had to go to hospital. It turned out I was having like an ovarian cyst thing. I came out of hospital and told everyone it was my appendix and then wondered why I was telling people it was my appendix, and then realised it's because I didn't really want to talk about the fact that I had ovaries. And then wondered why that was, and then like it kind of just flowed from there really quickly. It suddenly all coalesced in my head that I wasn't very comfortable about that stuff. But I also think if I'd never met a trans person, whether I would have then been able to put together, "Oh, I'm really not comfortable in my body, therefore what does that mean?" I don't know whether that kind of association would have happened quite so easily.

In terms of working out my own transition, probably meeting my first every real life trans man was a useful discovery. And then I commenced my own transition probably about 18 months after that.

Mark: Hi, I'm Mark Latchford, I'm the Associate Director of Pride and Diversity and have responsibility for our programs and membership community. Over the last few years, we've supported well over 120 organisations and their employees during a period of transition. We've helped them help the individual, we've helped the management, we've helped the colleagues. But the reality is, many organisations, really have not got their head around some of the challenges of transgender and gender diverse people have in joining an organisation let alone succeeding within the organisation.

Andrew: Research indicates that trans and gender diverse employees who have found employment tend to stay in the same job.

Mark: Transgender folk when they're supported, have a great deal of commitment to their employer. They rarely move. Their attrition is much less. However, they also don't move around when the general community, millennials in particular, do move around. So, the reality is, the recruitment process for many organisations is seen as a roadblock by transgender people. I do think gender diverse employees and also transgender employees, we've still got a long way to go.

Andrew: Aram, like many gender diverse and transgender people, experienced difficulties.

Aram: Oh absolutely, and particularly in the role that I was in when I transitioned. So, I was working in a drug and alcohol space and with juvenile offenders. So, when I was right in the middle of transitioning it was genuinely difficult to tell if I was a boy or a girl, and my name was ambiguous enough that they couldn't tell. They would try and throw things off by doing this. So, "What are you? Are you a boy or a girl?" To try and derail me. I would ask them what they thought I was and whatever they said was what I was. And then we kind of kept moving. So that was pretty entertaining to move through, but again, I think kind of having a sense of humour and just rolling through it was fine.

Andrew: So how did Aram tell his colleagues about his transition?

Aram: Yeah so it was interesting. My workplace, I worked in a state government agency when I transitioned. They had never had anyone transition there before, they didn't have a policy about transitioning employees. So I didn't really know what was going to happen when I told my manager that I transitioned. But they, essentially, said, "We don't know what to do about this, but let's work it out together." Which was kind of fantastic. So, they were very, I guess, person centred around, saying, "Well what do you want to do? How do you want to manage this? And we will support you to do that." Which, given I had no previous experience and no guiding kind of documents about what to do, was actually really great.

And the approach that we took was to keep it very, very low key. So, we just sent an email to my immediate kind of work colleagues that talked about my name changing and they used a subtle change in pronouns from the beginning of the email to the end of the email, and that was it. And we just sent that out as a, "FYI, the name is changing, it'd be great if people can try and get that right and acknowledging that you might mess that up and that's okay. And if you've got any questions, talk to us." With that pronoun change, and then sent it out and I think on a Thursday afternoon which was kind of deliberate. Gave enough time for people to come and ask questions if they needed to but had the weekend shortly ahead. And people got it straight away and there was either a kind of really happy go you kind of email sent back to me. I got a couple of questions, they were all really respectful. It was very low key and then everybody kept moving, which was fantastic.

Mark: Most managers really want to get the best out of their employees, get them the most productive, the most innovative, the most committed. And the best way to do that is establish a frank, honest relationship. If your employee has mentioned that they happen to be part of the LGBTI community, hear them out. Listen to their stories. What experiences they may have had, some of the challenges they feel, some of the conversations that they have to put up with. That generation of empathy will make a world of difference.

Andrew: Okay, this might be a good point at which to tackle some misconceptions. First up, what is transitioning?

Aram: You transition physically and then you grow up. Transition is essentially going through puberty, which is always fun when you're in your twenties, thirties or forties or whenever it happens. Having a second puberty. So you kind of have a puberty and then you need to become a grown up man or woman.

Andrew: Next, the big one.

Aram: Certainly, when I was first transitioning, every time someone would use the correct pronoun was really affirming and exciting. When I'd be in a restaurant or on a plane and someone would call me, "Sir," I had to kind of control myself not beaming and being super happy about that. So, my experience was less that I felt bad when someone used the previous pronouns for me and more that I felt really good when someone used my new pronouns. I know for other trans people, sometimes the experience is the opposite. So, having someone use the correct pronouns feels comfortable and when someone uses the incorrect pronouns it feels really awful for people, so that could be quite individual for folks. But regardless, using those correct pronouns just kind of makes you feel like the world is seeing you in the same way that you see yourself, which is really important.

And similarly, recognising that people need to go on a bit of a journey and won't necessarily get it right straight away, and if you can create a bit of space that says, "Ask some questions, you might mess it up a little bit, but I just want to see you trying and I just want you to come on this journey too." I think it makes everyone kind of relaxed, whereas as I think in circumstances where people are really rigid about this and say, "We need to make a really big deal out of this." It then becomes kind of a bigger deal. So, my personal experience and my kind of advice to people is to downplay rather than overplay it. Not taking away from making sure, that all of the right kind of appropriate respectful things happen at the same time.

Andrew: And last but not least, bathrooms.

Aram: Yeah, bathrooms always come up. It's like you cannot have a conversation about trans people in any context without a conversation about bathrooms, which I always find kind of amazing. I always think, in our own houses, I don't think I've ever been in to a private house where people have labelled boy and girl toilets. So we're pretty comfortable with the idea that people go in to whichever bathroom, mostly in life, and then suddenly we go in a public space and it becomes an issue.

And then again, the way I handled this when I was transitioning was I went with, at the point when women start freaking out about me being in the women's bathroom, that's probably the time for me to move in to the men's bathroom. And there is a weird twilight moment when you're transitioning when they freak out in both bathrooms. So you walk in to a women's toilet and they're like, " I don't think you should be here," and you walk in to the men's toilets and the men are like, "Why are you in here?"

So it is a real thing and it's just as uncomfortable, if not more uncomfortable, for the person transitioning as for everyone else. And when you transition in a workplace, the first time you walk in to the other gender bathroom and meet a colleague, there's this kind of all very awkward, "Oh now you're in here now," moment.

Andrew: So what are some of the practical things workplaces can do to better include trans and gender diverse colleagues?

Mark: My advice is pretty straight forward. First of all, listen to the employee. Listen to their story, their experiences, their concerns, their ambitions. That development of empathy between a manager and an employee is critical for productivity and success generically, but it's particularly important in establishing the confidence of the LGBTI employee.

Aram: I think one of the anxieties I had before I actually told my boss was the fact that there was nothing written down, so I had no idea how the organisation would respond. I hoped that because it was a state government agency, they would be reasonable, but I couldn't find any reassurance written down anywhere because there was no policy, there was no statement, there was nothing. So, I think the key thing that organisations can do is have something written down somewhere that says, "We embrace diversity of all of its kinds," and it specifically calls out diverse gender identities as part of that. And ideally, that has a policy for how we would support someone transitioning at work, even if that's never used or even if there's no one on staff who's known to be transgender or having that written down in the instance that then someone comes along, immediately sends a signal that this will be okay.

And then I think the next thing after that is if there is concerns about how people are going to respond in the workplace, then you need to manage how other people respond rather than managing the person who's transitioning, which sometimes can be what happens. It becomes a, "Can you not?" Or, "Can you slow it down?" Or, "Can we do it this way because I'm concerned about other people." Which then puts all of the pressure back on the person who's transitioning to change what's happening to them for the sake of everyone else. Imagine you have a 15 year old going through puberty who's attempting to kind of manage that, whilst also being an adult, putting additional demands on the person who's transitioning is not ideal. And so, being a manager and being responsible for looking after other people, I think, is a better way of doing that rather than pushing that pressure back on the person who's transitioning.

Mark: The reality is, the recruitment process for many organisations is seen as a roadblock by transgender people. The perception that recruiters, external and internal, have unconscious bias about the way transgender people may look and how they could deal with their organisation’s clients, for example and so forth. So, often, recruitment processes are seen as an extraordinary hurdle. Even the paperwork requested becomes a roadblock when university degrees have different names, police records have different names. These sorts of things, good organisations really need to consider as part of the recruitment.

Now, on top of that, once a transgender person has been recruited, it really is important that the logistics are sort of complementary. And what I mean by that is making sure that there’s appropriate toilet facilities, for example, that transgender feel comfortable in leveraging and so forth.

Andrew: Aram's experience also gave him a unique insight into gendered workplace norms.

Aram: I had a lot of contact with police officers and the difference in conversations when you're hanging out with a bunch of policemen when you're perceived as female versus perceived as male was really interesting. I had moments once I'd kind of finished transitioning was being read exclusively as male, where I would think, "You would not be having this conversation in this way if I was a woman in the room, and in fact I notice you shift in the way you talk to me when a woman walks in to the room." And for quite a while, I felt like a bit of a spy. I was kind of having insights to conversations that I would never had seen and would never had seen that change before when I was moving through the world presenting as female.

I'm still conscious of that. I'm less conscious of it now than I used to be but it's strange, I think. I use it to my advantage at work because I know it exists and so I've learnt how to work that but I still find it unusual and weird. And it's interesting being able to go, well in my current workplace, I'm one of the few men on the Executive team, so I sometimes quite deliberately go, well, I am a man, I will go have this conversation with that man because I'll be able to kind of tackle it from a different way and get further than, sorry, you will as a woman, even though that's atrocious.

Mark: The reality is, organisations need to step ahead to make the point that they understand. And my dream is that yes, we don't need to treat the LGBTI community as a community of employees that require particular, special, unique investment and focus. The reality is, we're not there yet, and we do need to make steps to change the understanding, change the culture, change the policy of practise to make sure everyone is equal and we're still not there yet.

Andrew: I'm your host, Andrew Maxwell, and this has been a podcast from DCA. Produced by Andrea Maltman, executive produced by Lisa Annese and with contributions from Catherine Petterson, DCA's communications director and Cathy Brown. You can keep the conversation going by reaching out on our Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter pages. If you like that you heard, subscribe to future episodes of the Art of Inclusion, either from the DCA website dca.org.au, or from your favourite podcast player. On our website you can access related DCA research, synopsis report, knowledge programs and also access best practise guidelines relating to bathrooms. Thanks for listening and catch you in the next episode when this happens.

Teaser: I believe that in order for the people to be their true selves at work, that they need to be working in environments where there is psychological safety around them as human beings. I think that that starts with leadership.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**