

2018 Michael Kirby LGBTIQ Inclusion AWARD

WINNER: QBE

Bringing your ‘whole self’ to work: the power LGBTI visibility has in driving an inclusive culture at QBE

Origins and principles

As an organisation, QBE is committed to a workplace culture where its people are recognised and valued for what makes each of them unique. Employee feedback indicated QBE had an opportunity to drive a shared sense of inclusive behaviours but more specifically, raise awareness and understanding of LGBTI inclusion as a workplace issue.

QBE firmly believes that a culture which celebrates and views difference as a competitive advantage is an enabler to delivering on the organisational strategic plan. All employees should feel comfortable and safe to bring their true authentic selves to work. One of the strongest indicators of whether this is possible are strong, visible and relatable role models as symbols of organisational culture.

Visible leadership commitment to support a culture of inclusion and take a “zero tolerance” approach to behaviours was foundational to its approach. An example of this was the lead up to the 2017 Marriage Equality Plebiscite, where the public debate led to the sharing of a range of views. Joining the Marriage Equality Campaign was a clear message of support to the QBE LGBTI community, their family and friends. Another challenge that QBE’s Pride Committee faced was awareness fatigue and “what has this got to do with work?” QBE’s firm belief was employees don’t leave their families, children or partners at the door and ultimately, everyone brings their sexuality to work each and every day because that’s just who they are. However, for many of the LGBTI community at QBE or other organisations there remained a sense for some of needing to deliberately conceal who they are.

The QBE CEO and leadership team were united in their support of LGBTI inclusion as an enabler of a positive organisational culture. There was an acknowledgement of the organisational risks this posed, with people and strong engagement at the centre of its success. One of the first areas of focus of the QBE Pride Committee, was to “engage hearts and minds”. This was achieved by raising awareness through education, taking an inclusive approach to events and engaging leaders as allies. But most importantly, it was achieved by profiling visible role models. The faces and experiences of the QBE LGBTI community would prove to be the strongest drivers of success.

Implementation

The QBE Pride Committee was launched in 2015. Core areas of focus included visible role models, storytelling and supporting all employees to bring their whole selves to work. For some of the team, it meant being out for the first time in the workplace which continued to emphasize the importance of visible role models.

The QBE journey started with visible senior leadership from the outset. Liam Buckley, QBE Pride Global Council Chair and at the time Group Head of Internal Audit, joined the 2016 Lloyds Dive-in Festival in Sydney on a panel of LGBTI leaders. He candidly shared his experience as an out leader stating 15 years ago he dreaded being asked to bring his partner to work functions, “I remember the feeling of panic that used to come over me”.

He was also recognised for his impact as a senior role model in the inaugural 2016 Outstanding 50 LGBTI Leaders.

Senior allies also play a critical role, with the QBE Pride Executive Sponsor continuing to be an active and visible advocate. Whilst there have been changes in the Executive Sponsorship roles over the years, the mandate remains consistent to drive an inclusive culture through advocacy, action and visible support.

QBE continued to visibly demonstrate LGBTI support through participation in the 2016 Mardi Gras Parade, with the QBE Pride Committee leads joining the Pride in Diversity Float. The event had two clear outcomes. One was the opportunity to enhance the QBE brand as an inclusive employer and corporate citizen, and the other the opportunity to drive LGBTI inclusion as a broader social issue. This approach has continued to present day. In the 34 years of sponsorship of the Sydney Swans, it was the 2016 Pride match where QBE supplied rainbow socks to all Swans supporters, a further statement of the importance of supporting the LGBTI Community and LGBTI inclusion.

In 2017 QBE continued this tradition by hosting senior leaders – including the CEO of QBE and key business partners – in the corporate box at the 2017 Pride match. The event provided an opportunity to discuss the activities of the QBE Pride Committee in addition to the important role we can all play to support LGBTI colleagues and community.

Since 2015 the QBE Pride Committee has hosted an annual QBE global event in June - Pride Month. 2017 saw the launch of a courageous video story “Bring your selfie to work” featuring QBE LGBTI employees, in addition to the launch of national LGBTI awareness training sessions. It was also in 2017 a senior female leader made the bold step to join as co-Chair of the Pride Committee. The significance of this was not lost on QBE employees as it meant coming out to the whole organisation for the first time. On this step, she said:

“My additional role as Network Lead really meant “Bringing the Whole of Myself” to my workplace. Thanks to all that sent messages or stopped me in the corridor to share your support.”

The courage of this individual acted as a catalyst for other LGBTI women at QBE feel they can bring their whole selves to work.

Benefits and Outcomes

QBE's most impactful achievement has been reached without budget or a campaign, but by simply profiling its people. The faces and experiences of the QBE LGBTI community proved to be the strongest driver of success, demonstrated by an incredible 250% increase in the Pride Network over a 12-month period.

The most significant outcome realised through the Committee's agenda has been two employees seeking support for their respective gender transitions. One employee stated, “I could not have done this at my previous employer.” Senior leadership support was clear from the outset for both employees. In one case the individual's manager, Head of D&I, Head of HR and the employee formed a support team in partnership with Pride in Diversity. From there QBE developed a comprehensive transition plan, supported by education sessions. Three Transition Awareness Sessions (facilitated by Pride in Diversity) were attended by approximately 90 employees. Signage on the accessible toilets was changed on each QBE occupied floor to gender neutral toilets.

QBE wanted to ensure its people were educated and able to provide support in a respectful and appropriate manner. Sessions were made available to all employees that worked on the same floor regardless of whether they worked directly with the employee or not. Feedback following the sessions included employees stating “It makes me proud to work for QBE” and “I don't know X, but what could I do on the first day of her affirmed gender so that she knows I support her?” The training sessions were held whilst the employee was on a period of leave to manage the final stage of their

transition. In contrast, the other employee is on a longer journey. As a duty of care for this employee, QBE wanted to ensure their colleagues were educated and understood the role they played to contribute to an inclusive workplace. This involved hosting three general LGBTI Awareness Sessions, with a specific focus on transitioning in the workplace and 1:1 counselling session with Pride in Diversity for this employee.

QBE are incredibly proud of both outcomes which they believe would not have been possible without the support of leadership or the QBE Pride Committee

Summary

- Through the active support of the QBE Pride Committee, leadership team and importantly visible LGBTI role models across the organisation, QBE has maintained a sustained commitment to an inclusive workplace culture with people at the centre, who feel valued and respected for who they are as individuals.