

RAISING THE BAR

Affirming Transgender People in Our Legal Practices

Best Practices

Updated: May 19, 2019

Here are some easy best practices that attorneys and legal professionals can implement in our daily work and strive to incorporate into the profession's culture of access, equity, and justice.

1. **Educate yourself** about what you don't know, and then **turn what you learn into action** to affect change in your workplace, practice, and in the world. Knowledge without action is inert, so put it to use!
2. **Dare to imagine what a truly equitable legal practice could look like.** Be willing to go beyond mere compliance and shoot for **excellence**. When working to make those big dreams a reality, be sure to take an **intersectional approach** to any brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making, and strategic planning. Invite participants with diverse life experiences to join the conversation and consider how your ideas will impact people who are not like you.
3. **Honor everyone's authenticity.** Celebrate difference, and foster affirming and acceptance beyond mere tolerance. This will positively impact your interpersonal relationships and conversations, but can also translate into inclusive template intake forms, court documents, etc.
4. **Don't assume to know anything** about a person's gender identity or sexual orientation (among other things) by observation alone. Make it a practice to ask every person how they would like to be addressed, so that you are treating everyone with the same level of respect and dignity.
5. **Words are powerful** – wield them wisely and thoughtfully.
6. If you make a mistake with someone's name or pronoun, **apologize once and move on**, and then do some work on your own to improve. One great tool for this is PracticeWithPronouns.com.
7. **Cultivate a culture of accountability.** We must work together to create better habits and practices of treating everyone with respect and dignity. Instead of calling people out for their mistakes – which makes them feel ashamed or judged and leads to defensiveness or resentment – try **calling people in**. When you see or hear someone make mistakes, invite them to understand how their words or behavior are incorrect or harmful, and offer suggestions for doing things differently in the future.
8. **Assume the best of people and the worst of systems of oppression.** The world we live in often doesn't celebrate or even recognize trans people as human beings. We can each play a role in combatting systemic erasure of trans people, one act of allyship at a time. We won't always do it perfectly, and we will make a few mistakes. But it's important that we keep trying and support one another in doing so.