Why are there so few LGBT+ CEOs in business? Involve calls for targets to be set to boost LGBT+ representation

Involve, the global network championing diversity and inclusion in business, is calling for companies to collect data and set targets in order to increase LGBT+ representation.

Several companies have published public targets for gender and ethnically diverse representation but not LGBT+, leaving LGBT+ employees out in the cold when it comes to holding companies to account on diversity with hard data.

The call comes as today (Tuesday 19th January) marks the launch of the annual INvolve OUT standing LGBT+ Role Models Lists, supported by Yahoo Finance, which celebrates businesspeople playing a key role in breaking down barriers at work for LGBT+ individuals; using their positions to keep diversity and inclusion at the top of the agenda.

There are currently just four publicly out LGBT+ CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and no publicly out LGBT+ CEOs in the FTSE 100; and these figures haven’t improved for several years. In fact, there are now fewer LGBT+ CEOs in the FTSE 100 than in 2018.

In recognizing that representation across the globe needs to change, INvolve is calling for companies to collect data on LGBT+ individuals at board and executive level, just as they do for gender and race. It should also be the intention of organisations to set targets for LGBT+ representation when it comes to pipelining and candidate slates for leadership positions. They should also collect data company-wide and set targets for LGBT+ representation across all levels.

Now in their 8th year, the OUT standing lists celebrate LGBT+ leaders in business and can help to change perceptions and support more LGBT+ individuals to rise to the top of their organisations. Involver’s Founder and CEO, Suki Sandhu OBE, who was awarded his OBE in 2019 for services to diversity in business, has worked for nearly a decade on advising companies on how to improve diversity.

He said: “These lists demonstrate that you can be successful and out at work, but most importantly also inspire the next generation of LGBT+ leaders to reach these senior positions. It must be made a top priority that LGBT+ inclusion does not fall behind other areas of inclusion but instead joins the general call for accountability and action. This is why INvolve are also calling for targets to be set to improve LGBT+ representation.”

As individuals rise through a company, there is greater expectation for professional and personal lives to overlap, through social and networking events. Personal lives will be under scrutiny both publicly, and within the company itself and for professionals who are not out, this has the potential to be a barrier to promotion. Potential senior leaders may find it hard to be out and in a senior leadership position in international organisations when they have operations in countries where LGBT+ rights are not respected.

Sandhu continues: “Companies need to be vocal on LGBT+ rights everywhere and show their support for the issues in all the regions they operate in. LGBT+ professionals are managing an array of obstacles alongside the pressures of their day jobs; from overcoming bias or discrimination or having to deal with the mental and emotional impact of coming out repeatedly to colleagues and clients. It’s our role to ensure LGBT+ professionals have that access and opportunity to climb the corporate ladder.”
High flying professionals from over 20 different countries made this year’s OUTstanding Role Model Lists, illustrating the positive impact that so many businesspeople are having in actioning meaningful change for LGBT+ issues.

Beth Ford, President and CEO of Land O’Lakes tops this year’s global OUTstanding Executives Role Model List, with Moriaki Kida, Regional Chief Operating Officer at EY Japan taking the second spot. In the UK, Angela Darlington, UK Life CEO at Aviva Plc is number three. Darlington commented: “It’s a tremendous honour to have been included on the OUTstanding LGBT+ Role Model List in each of its eight years.

“The positivity I have received at being an out gay woman CEO has been fantastic and over the last decade the increasing energy, belief and enthusiasm I’ve seen across our LGBT+ community in business has been incredible. But there are still real challenges for our community and in these difficult times the role model list is an important showcase of the extraordinary LGBT+ talent succeeding in businesses globally.”

Also featuring in the Executives list include Allyn L. Shaw, President & CTO at Recycle Track Systems at number four, Javier Constante, President, Latin America at Dow at number seven, Amanda McKay, Quality & Assurance Director at Balfour Beatty at number 36 and Amin Kassam, Head of Legal, Asia-Pacific at Bloomberg at number 38.

Meanwhile, Leigh F. Capule, Migrations Manager at HSBC is named at number one in the OUTstanding 100 LGBT+ Future Leaders List, which highlights those tipped for future leadership success. Capule is joined by other emerging leaders including:

- Méfiré Diallo, Team Leader at American Express, at number two
- Bobbi Pickard, Senior Project Manager at bp, at number four
- Jeiz Robles, HR Services Deliver Partner Executive at IBM at number 16
- Josi Reinhardt, Customer Services Representative at Aviva, at number 89

Leigh F. Capule said: “Being selected as the winner of 2020’s OUTstanding Future Leaders List is a validation that my identity as a Transgender Woman is being recognised, valued and celebrated.

“LGBT+ representation in leadership roles is critical for any organisation that endeavours to achieve inclusion. Recognition acknowledges our existence but having a seat at the centre table is proof that the Leaders of the organisation are embracing the culture of equality amongst its people.”

Greg Case, CEO of professional services firm Aon, has been named the leading Advocate for LGBT+ professionals in the 2020 honours alongside Microsoft’s Daniel Klein and Group Managing Director of Manchester United, Richard Arnold.

Méfiré Diallo, Team Leader at American Express

“I am a strong believer in representation hence I’ve consciously made the choice to be out at American Express especially because I am occupying a leadership role. I hope that by being out I can inspire people to bring their full selves to work but also show that it is possible to grow within a corporate company regardless of their sexual orientation, race or gender identity."
“To be named on the OUTstanding list is a fantastic achievement for myself but also for Black Queer individuals who might see that opportunities to succeed are absolutely for them too. I embrace this recognition with highest gratitude and hope it contributes to changing the narratives linking Blackness and Queerness to something positive is what we need in the current racial and social justice environment.”

Amanda McKay, Quality & Assurance Director at Balfour Beatty

“I’m delighted to be included in the top 100 LGBT+ Executives list this year, as an out Trans Woman it’s good to be recognised but particularly as I work in a sector that has so few senior LGBT+ role models.

“Construction and Engineering have not always been the most attractive and diverse sectors for out LGBT+ people but much work has been done to make the sector more diverse and inclusive in recent years and I’m proud to have been part of that transformation. Supporting the ED & I programme in Balfour Beatty and as an exec member of Building Equality has helped to drive positive change in my sector.”

Kevin O’Byrne, Board Sponsor for LGBT+ and Chief Financial Officer at Sainsbury’s

“It’s an honour to be featured in the INvolve 2020 OUTstanding LGBT+ Role Model List. At Sainsbury’s, we want to be the most trusted and inclusive retailer, creating an environment where every individual feels comfortable and can progress their career.

“Our teams have created very active networks like Proud@Sainsbury’s, with the aim to make Sainsbury’s a great place to work for our LGBT+ colleagues. The team leading the Proud@Sainsbury’s network do a tremendous job. In my role, as CFO and Board Sponsor, I am dedicated to ensuring that our colleagues feel supported and feel like they can embrace their differences when they come to work.”

Josi Reinhardt, Customer Services Representative at Aviva

“Coming out as queer was one thing, but accepting myself as queer and embracing it as an opportunity to be the person I wanted to be was another. I want to be the mentor to younger members of the LGBT+ community that I needed when I was their age. I want to use what makes me different to make a difference.

“I am very grateful to be on the OUTstanding Future Leaders’ List, which gives me an amazing opportunity to share my story and to amplify voices of our community that are often not heard, especially trans and nonbinary people.”

Bobbi Pickard, Senior Project Manager at bp

“It’s such an honour to be in this list again - it highlights the innovative work of bp, Trans in the City and INvolve setting the inclusion bar ever higher.

“The situation for trans people in society and business is worsening, in addition to the effects of COVID. We need enlightened allies to actively support trans people and businesses to implement the inclusion policies that have been talked about for so long. The COVID reset gives the opportunity to build back with empathy at the core of our organisations benefitting both our employees and businesses - we should not waste it.”
