At IBM we recognise that whilst individuals can achieve remarkable things, it's how people work together that's changing the world. We work with governments and corporations on real global challenges, providing ground-breaking solutions to help build a smarter planet. We recognise that if lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees can be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity they are more effective. From our experience, we know that bringing our whole selves to work has a positive impact on the teams we work in and the clients, partners and suppliers we work and collaborate with. We are proud to sponsor this report and believe that it will help people everywhere, to be open about who they are, positive about their impact, and confident of the future.

Stephen Leonard
Chief Executive, IBM UK and Ireland
Stonewall’s Diversity Champions Programme now has over 600 members employing 5.5 million staff, making it the largest non-governmental intervention of its kind in the world. The reason these employers work with us is because they’ve recognised that people are their most important resource. At a time of economic challenge, enabling good staff – including good lesbian, gay and bisexual staff – to be exceptional becomes more important than ever.

We meet other organisations who disagree. They sometimes suggest that sexual orientation has nothing to do with the workplace and being gay is something inherently private. But when we speak to the gay staff of those employers they tell a different story: not being able to be open about their sexual orientation makes them feel both unhappy and disconnected from their work. It affects their relationships with colleagues and clients and they feel isolated.

At Stonewall we know exactly how important role models are to our sense of self. Young people tell us how much better they feel when they know another gay person and staff in big and small workplaces alike say they can imagine being successful when they see people like them succeeding. This report, kindly sponsored by IBM, shows that people like us can succeed. We may not see ourselves in every portrait here but there are elements in all of these stories that can inspire. Imagine how your colleagues, heterosexual and gay, would feel if they knew yours?

**Ben Summerskill**  
*Chief Executive, Stonewall*
“By being who I am
I’ve been able to channel my energies into what matters.
I don’t have to maintain a façade that is self-defeating
and attacks my integrity.”

“Feeling you can be as open
as you want to be is, I think, a very
freeing experience and one that can be
hugely powerful.”

“Let your cracks emerge
or you’ll stop taking risks
and you won’t learn anything.”

“People, like me, in very visible senior leadership roles
need to own up to themselves and say:
‘You’re a role model. Get over it!’”
“I think I’ve worried in the past about being seen as ‘the lesbian on campus’ but, actually, I don’t think you can be ‘too gay’ or too much like yourself.”

“I couldn’t run an institution which is about success and openness and pride in young people if I was hidden, closeted and frightened.”

“I’m conscious enough of the power I have to help those around me… It all goes back to the fact that, not so long ago, people helped me.”

“I come from a background where there weren’t many professionals… so coming out has really been a factor in building my professional life.”
All lesbian, gay and bisexual people have to make decisions about whether to be open about their sexual orientation at work. This is rarely a decision that only has to be made once. Whenever a gay person meets a new colleague or client, joins a new team or even works temporarily in a different country, they have to consider if and when they want to disclose their sexual orientation.

Since the publication in 2008 of Peak Performance, Stonewall’s ground-breaking research into workplace productivity, progressive British employers increasingly understand that their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff are more efficient, confident, creative and motivated when they feel able to be open about their sexual orientation. Gay people report that the burden of not being open about their sexual orientation, and worrying about whether or not they can be out at work, has a significant impact on their efficiency and productivity.

The ability of almost every private and public organisation to produce the best service or product is dependent on the knowledge, skills and contributions of their entire workforce. High performing staff are critical to effectiveness, success and competitive advantage. The very best employers create a workplace culture where all staff can be themselves. These employers take active steps to ensure their workplace is one where their gay staff can be open about who they are with colleagues, clients, customers and service-users. In doing so their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff form better relationships with the people they work with, they enjoy going to work and report greater feelings of workplace engagement and loyalty. The most progressive organisations recognise the inherent benefit of supporting staff to bring their whole selves to work and the positive outcomes of enabling their entire workforce to be authentic. People who are authentic are open and honest about their values and they behave in a way that is consistent with those values. They are able to demonstrate integrity in both their internal and external engagements. Their colleagues report that they are easier to follow as managers and leaders because they know who they are and what they stand for.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people have particular insight into what it is to be authentic because they have direct experience of what it feels like to be inauthentic. These are moments or extended periods of time when their values, beliefs and ideas about who they are seem either compromised or divorced from their actions and behaviours. Gay people have to repeatedly consider how peers, clients or managers might respond to their sexual orientation. Some lesbian, gay and bisexual staff recognise that it isn’t always desirable, or even safe, to be open about their sexual orientation. They can’t be sure that the new people they meet – clients or other staff – won’t judge them for being gay. They’re also often not clear that their employer would respond supportively to discrimination if it occurred.

Some gay people still hear homophobic remarks and comments from colleagues that go
unchallenged. They worry that if others find out they’re gay this will affect their career progression. They have a very real concern that their managers won’t understand the connection between being able to be open about being gay and performance. They say that when they are unable to be open about their sexual orientation they put unnecessary energy into maintaining an exhausting fiction of heterosexuality. Who we really are is important to what we do and how we do it. And trying hard to edit out an integral part of who we are can make us feel inauthentic. This insight is equally relevant to other staff who may feel compromised if they can’t bring their whole selves to work too. For example, someone who takes care of his father may choose not to share this with his employer but if his colleagues knew, they would understand why he doesn’t join them for drinks after work. An employee may be reluctant to say that she is depressed, but consequently her manager thinks she is uninterested in her work or her future with the company.

Gay staff report that they would prefer to direct all their energy to productive use by focusing on their performance, completing tasks or enhancing their work-related relationships. The visibility of successful lesbian, gay and bisexual role models makes a broader point to colleagues, both heterosexual and gay, about the value and importance of being open about our differences. Role models provide clear evidence that being who you are, more often and as effectively as possible, is a good thing. Their careers show the benefit of being able to focus energy and attention on performing well and using their talents. They offer a compelling case for the value of authenticity by demonstrating that some of the risks associated with people being themselves are worth taking.

The best employers recognise that they have to proactively create a workplace culture which naturally enables role models to emerge. Other gay staff are able to see that they too can be open about their sexual orientation if they want to be. These progressive organisations make sure robust policies are in place making it clear that discrimination won’t be tolerated. They respond to homophobia when they hear it. They support initiatives such as lesbian, gay and bisexual staff network groups. They ask staff about their experiences and respond to problems. They recognise the impact that not being open has on their gay staff and they support them, through initiatives such as the Stonewall Leadership Programme, to be themselves.

Successful organisations employ good leaders at every level. A good role model is someone who understands the potential they have to influence others and uses that influence constructively. He or she recognises that they can use that influence even if they hold the most junior role in the organisation. A role model is not an example of a perfect individual. They recognise their fallibility and they share what they’ve learned with the people around them. They have reflected on the values that matter to them and live those values. They also acknowledge how they can help, and inspire, others to live their own values too. Good role models, whatever their background or level of influence, exercise good leadership at work. Seeing visible lesbian, gay and bisexual role models living a range of successful and interesting professional lives demonstrates the value of authenticity to all staff, heterosexual and gay. They demonstrate that difference is both possible and, ultimately, a significant advantage in the workplace. For any organisation wanting to attract, retain, develop and release the full potential of its talent, the following stories evidence the power of authentic leadership from a range of perspectives, sectors and experiences.
Sarah is Chief Executive at The Legacy List, a charity to support the cultural and educational legacy of the future Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and its surroundings. After becoming the first female MD at Lloyd’s of London, she moved into the arts 15 years ago and has since held senior roles at a variety of organisations, including the Royal Academy of Arts, the Almeida Theatre, Arts Council England and the Olympic Delivery Authority.
All my life I’ve been a broker. I put ideas and people together to make things happen. I started out as an insurance broker at Lloyd’s in the 1980s and in a different way it’s what I’ve continued to do in the arts, most recently at the Olympic Park, overseeing the integration of arts and culture with design, engineering and landscape.

When I worked in the City, it was a very different place to how it is now. If people were gay, it simply wasn’t discussed. I wasn’t out in the City and was terrified that people would find out. As the first female Managing Director, the last thing I wanted was for anyone to know I was gay. It was difficult enough being a woman.

I didn’t always realise that I was gay but the minute I knew, I knew. I had lots of lovely and disastrous relationships and then I met my partner. Once I found the right relationship everything changed. I couldn’t possibly continue living the life I’d been living, because it was a charade. I was successful but I wasn’t satisfied intellectually or emotionally, because I wasn’t really being me. There was a defensiveness and brittleness about me then. I had a barrier up to keep people away.

I made a very clear decision to leave the City and start my life again in the arts. From that moment, I was out and I think it’s really changed the way that I am with people. So what am I like to work for? I try to pay attention to others and I help them develop themselves. I watch them, listen to them, see where their talent is and encourage them.

I help people. If they make mistakes I make sure they don’t worry about it. I think I’m quite flexible, probably helped by being able to be myself personally and professionally. It means I can jump into things and feel reasonably relaxed in challenging situations; this helped when faced with integrating arts and culture into the Olympic park where, initially, I had no team and no budget and was working in the often challenging environment of a construction company. It was tough. But three-and-a-half years on, the work of my small team made a big difference to the look and feel of the park for the long-term.

Having lesbian, gay and bisexual role models is very important. It shows others you can be who you are.

Like other lesbian and gay people, I’m gay but I’m lots of other things as well. Gay people exist in all walks of life. When I was working in the City and realised I was gay, there were no role models. I didn’t know who to talk to, where to go or how to deal with it at all.

Now I love hearing someone like Evan Davis doing a high profile job on the Today Programme; he’s openly gay but that’s not the whole thing about him. I think he has brought a different perspective and outlook to the programme.

I’m mindful of the qualities of role models who have most affected me: boldness, vision, wisdom, a deep truthful passion, astute political awareness and a sense of constancy. People who know who they are and don’t try to be something they’re not.

And that last point is key; I think that the more you can be you, and do things in a way that feels right for you, the better. I wish I could have been more ‘me’ much younger and I would say to younger gay people, ‘Don’t wait until you’re my age. You can do it now.’
Waheed Alli was made a Labour peer in 1997 at the age of 33. Co-founder of the media production company, Planet24, he is chairman of the online retailer ASOS.com and was previously Managing Director of Carlton Television.
I was running Carlton Television at the time Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party. That was an anomaly in itself: I was black, I was gay and I was in charge of a broadcaster. I think that so much was changing at the time it almost went unnoticed that there were openly gay people in his sphere of influence.

I was part of both the machine running the election campaign and the group who were talking about race and sexuality in terms of Labour’s change agenda. The defining moment for me in terms of sexual orientation was Tony Blair putting me into the House of Lords straight after the 1997 election. I discovered I was the first openly gay peer ever – and the youngest ever – when I was reading an article about me in The Sunday Times. I realised my sexuality would define me publicly for the rest of my life but I didn’t want to be defined by it.

From the moment I set up my own company I was open about my sexuality. Not only open but I embraced it and tried to create a workforce where we could be open about who we were and what we did. I was defined by the programmes I made, by the businesses I ran, by my boyfriend and my family. Not by my sexuality.

And then I had a different realisation: ‘Why shouldn’t I be defined by it?’ I didn’t want to be someone who lived a life of political success but changed nothing.

My experiences as a young person were defined by the colour of my skin. British politics at that time was about race. My choices and my interest in the politics of change were reactions to Norman Tebbit and voluntary repatriation, and the riots in Brixton and Toxteth, more than it being about sexuality.

When I was choosing between parties, Labour was dominated by the white heterosexual trade unions which were incredibly homophobic. They liked gay people no more than the Conservative establishment so there was no clear difference between them. At 16 or 17, sexuality became interesting for me in terms of: ‘When I’m a human target because of the colour of my skin, why would I volunteer up something else that adds further risk?’ But when Tony Blair put me in the House of Lords I thought: ‘No, you can do something here’. I realised I had a responsibility to make sure that young people, and black people and gay people will continue to be appointed.

I didn’t choose to be the first openly gay peer but it’s something you have to embrace. I’d always been behind the scenes in politics but you can’t have a private political mission. Whether it’s going back into the House of Lords to defend civil partnerships in religious premises, or anything that pushes you to the foreground, you make a choice to go out there because it’s important.

Each civil partnership moves us further firmly into what is Middle England centre ground and any gay public figure has a responsibility to help the next generation secure that. I’ve been very successful in business and I want more gay young people in the media and in journalism. I want gay young people to end up running FTSE 100 companies. I want more gay chief executives. I want them to see a political career as an option.
Maeve is a Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist at Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. An ex-DJ, she works with individuals, couples and families in adult services and is an alumnus of Stonewall's NHS Leadership Programme.
I have a theory that most gay people have to consider making unpopular choices at an early age.

We need to manage the risk of alienating people close to us who might see us as ‘other’. If you can handle, ‘Will they still like me? Can I do this?’, you develop a sense that risks are not only possible but generally productive too.

I took a risk in my first interview for a psychotherapy placement at an East London substance abuse agency. My experience of being Northern Irish and coming to England for the first time was of feeling ‘less good’ and I tend to address those sorts of feelings head on.

These two guys were talking about the importance of having services that reflected the population so I asked: ‘Have you got a lesbian and gay service? I’m a lesbian and I really think it’s an issue.’ I remember thinking I was blowing it. Not only had I come out in a very explicit way, I’d also told them what they should be doing!

I’m afraid I’m not somebody who lets things emerge naturally. But it was brilliant. I got the placement and worked there for about 15 years. Before then, I really can’t claim to have a traditional background for a psychotherapist. I was never a social worker, never a nurse, never a doctor.

I came to England from Northern Ireland and ran nightclubs for ten years. I realised it would be humiliating to be doing that well into my thirties so I started thinking: ‘What next?’

I’d used therapy when my mum died and found it really useful. I thought, ‘I’d like to do that,’ and started the very, very long training to become a therapist. I love it. I think I always had a clear sense that you must only choose to do work that you really love. I always put my sexual orientation on the table at an early stage because I don’t want other people shifting into casual homophobia unawares. I also tend to work it into application forms so organisations are clear about who I am from the get-go.

I’ve got to say I hadn’t thought of myself as a role model but I don’t have any discomfort about it because it’s a good thing. I had role models. They were wonderful. They probably didn’t think of themselves as role models either. But if somebody else thinks you might be one then maybe you really can take it on trust.

You can’t consciously try to be a role model because you just end up falling over your own feet. And this idea that role models have to be this perfect Teflon kind of person is so inhibiting. Let your cracks emerge or you’ll stop taking risks and you won’t learn anything.

One thing that’s really important for me is to tell people when I think they’re really good. It made a huge difference when people did that for me. You can’t consciously try to be a role model because you just end up falling over your own feet. And this idea that role models have to be this perfect Teflon kind of person is so inhibiting. Let your cracks emerge or you’ll stop taking risks and you won’t learn anything.

One thing that’s really important for me is to tell people when I think they’re really good. It made a huge difference when people did that for me. I’m not threatened by other people being great.

If you’ve got a sense of your own abilities, and you know these aren’t the same as other people, there’s nothing scary about them being fabulous. It’s why confident bosses are always the best to work for. They want you to bring the whole of yourself because you’ll contribute more, have better ideas and work your socks off.

If you invest yourself in something you care about you’ll probably end up being a role model for someone. If that doesn’t work for an employer, you know what? It’s probably not a great place for you to be.
James is a Lance Corporal in the Household Cavalry. He joined the Army straight from school at 16 and has seen active service in Iraq as well as ceremonial duties in London.
Thomas and I caused a media storm by getting married in 2010. We were the first gay couple to have a wedding in the Household Cavalry’s 350-year history. I got married in full state uniform and when we came down the steps arm-in-arm after the ceremony people were going: ‘Bloody hell! Look there’s a soldier getting married to his husband!’

As a cadet, I’d already had my eye on a career in the Army. I remember the stuff on telly back then about them not letting gay people serve and even when the ban was repealed there were interviews saying it was the worst thing that had ever happened to the Army. Before the ban was lifted in the UK, the military police could do whatever they wanted to find out if you were gay.

They could follow you when you were off duty, see where you were hanging out, go through your mail and read your bank statements. Still, I signed up straight from secondary school in 2003 at the age of 16 and I was posted to London a year later.

My first report said I was underachieving and I knew it was because I wanted to be openly gay. I could see gay couples holding hands in the street and I just felt like I was missing out. One Saturday evening I came out to four of my closest friends and, by the time I went back to work on Monday, rumours were spreading like wildfire. I was incredibly apprehensive but one senior officer made a real difference. His name was Kieran. He called me into his office and said: ‘I’ve heard. And I think you’re a very brave man. And if you need time off to go and tell your parents, you can have it.’ His attitude meant everyone else fell into line.

I was deployed to Iraq for seven months in 2007. I met one American lad who was gay. I was gutted for him. It wasn’t okay to be gay in the American army. If I’d been in Iraq and it wasn’t fine to be open about the fact I was in love with another man, I wouldn’t have been an effective soldier. If I’d had to live with that worry while fighting a war, there’s a bloody good chance I wouldn’t have come back. I wouldn’t have had all my concentration on the job and I wouldn’t have been the only one. The operational effectiveness of the British army improved when they lifted that ban. The army became a better place – fact.

When I came back I did an interview for Soldier Magazine, the army’s internal publication. Everybody has it. I thought it would just be a tiny article. The next thing I knew I’m on the front page and it’s one of the biggest features they’ve ever done. I think that’s when you realise you’re a role model.

Recently I became involved in Stonewall’s Education for All campaign, telling my story in schools. On almost every occasion I’ve come away in awe of someone else. One 14-year-old persuaded his school to donate to Stonewall because of how homophobic bullying affected him. I don’t know if he’s gay or not, and I don’t care, but he’s clearly a role model.

A 15-year-old girl refused to give in to her local authority when they told her they didn’t have the money to provide a youth group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. And she won. What they’ve both achieved is real. You can see it and you can feel it and you can taste it. That’s what role models are all about.
Margot is Conservative MP for Stourbridge and a former vice chairman of the Conservative Party. Before entering politics Margot was Head of European Healthcare for Ogilvy & Mather after founding her own company, Shire Health PR.
I was interested in politics from a young age at a time when there was no real difference between the parties in their attitude to gay equality.

Both the main political parties discriminated against gay people and it was inconceivable that an openly gay person would be nominated as a Labour or Conservative party candidate. I met a woman at university and we were open about our relationship, meaning the career in politics I had set my heart on was not to be. Or so I thought at the time.

Despite the efforts of the gay rights movement it seemed inconceivable that our political parties would change. The attitude that homosexuality, although legal, was wrong was ingrained in virtually all walks of life. If you were willing to lead a double life you could be on the right side of the law but nothing more. There were of course gay MPs but they were forced to lead a double life. Some were outed by the media with terrible consequences. I would have been very uncomfortable with people having the power to wreck my life in that way.

Abandoning my political aspirations was not such a huge sacrifice. A few years after graduating from university I co-founded a business which prospered and gave me a rewarding career. Business also gave me a great deal of experience that has been valuable to me in politics. I was fortunate in that my sexuality did not affect my business career. Attitudes started to change in the early 1990s but in business and politics many gay people still felt obliged to lead a double life, which has profound consequences. If you can’t be at ease with yourself it is difficult to be comfortable around others. Trying to conceal a fundamental part of your identity places a barrier between yourself and others that undermines your effectiveness as a team player: it is difficult to trust others and be trusted in return. When I was younger there were far fewer visibly gay people in society. Seeing someone like Martina Navratilova being open and in the public eye was an enormous boost. Martina, confident, unashamed and so successful that she could not be humiliated was an inspiration to me. Suddenly it was possible to be openly gay and successful. This realisation compensated for the fact that my sexuality was a disappointment to my family and looked like being a barrier to me in other ways as well. The other pivotal moment for me was Lord Chris Smith, then MP for Islington South & Finsbury, coming out in 1984 as the first openly gay MP. For those people who would comment, “It’s no concern of mine what gay people get up to in private – as long as they don’t promote it”, it is salutary to note that he chose to make this declaration during a rally against Rugby town council’s proposed ban on gay employees.

I don’t think of myself as a role model but I do feel a sense of responsibility to address the challenges still faced by gay people – and young gay people especially. The changes of the last decade mean we are now equal in the eyes of the law. But some walks of life are seemingly impervious to change. A great deal of homophobia still exists in football and other sports to a lesser extent. Bullying is still a problem in schools and teachers are uncertain about how to tackle the cultural attitudes that reinforce the negative self image that haunts many young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

Since Chris Smith made that brave decision twenty five years ago there have been some fifty openly gay MPs. There are many successful and openly gay people in other professions as well. I hope this progress helps young people to realise that being gay no longer places any limit on people’s career aspirations.
Neil has been the Deputy Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry since 2011. He joined the CBI in 2002, spearheading work on employment regulation, public service reform, infrastructure and climate change. Neil is a trustee of Stonewall and a Non-Executive Director of the Carbon Trust.
Some companies or politicians would know me as Neil Bentley of the CBI. But they wouldn’t necessarily know me as Neil Bentley, gay man.

Standing up and saying, ‘This is who I am’, is increasingly important to me in terms of people really understanding me. I want to demonstrate to people what can be achieved in a role just through being yourself and harnessing who you are to your advantage.

Being confident and comfortable in myself means people see the real me. If there’s any element of hiding, for whatever reason, it usually leaks out. People just instinctively know something’s not quite right. I think being comfortable in your own skin shines through in any situation. And I think it’s such a strong driver for getting results too.

The people I’ve admired as role models offer the integrity, professionalism and credibility that comes from real belief in what they’re doing. They don’t just talk about it. They’re the people who get things done.

I recognise the profile of the organisation I work for and its influence in the public space. I’m currently leading a big piece of work that will look at growing the future membership of the CBI. We need the CBI, and the faces of the CBI, to be different and to look different, reflecting the face of modern British business. To do that the CBI needs to help develop future business leaders.

We’ll be working with women, gay people, ethnic minority business people and people with disabilities – people with the potential to lead their businesses. Actions speak louder than words so I’m going to invest a huge amount of personal capital in getting this done.

Organisations have to do more than embrace diversity with just words and policies. They need to demonstrate that they’re promoting people on the basis of talent, whoever they are and whatever they do.

For me to be seen as a gay man who’s also the number two at the CBI is a really powerful statement – personally, professionally and organisationally. I am clear there is a role I can play internally and externally and it makes me hope that more and more people stand up as role models.

I grew up during the troubled times of 1970s and 1980s Belfast and I keenly felt a sense of injustice. Religious discrimination in Northern Ireland divided Belfast schools between Catholics and Protestants and there were very few overlaps. At the same time, I was realising I was gay and getting bullied. I remember talking about religious discrimination and gay discrimination in the same sentence with my parents. Along the way, I became passionate about challenging discrimination which I think was partly about externalising and doing something with the feelings I had. I believed in doing something about it, and wanted to be able to say I’d made a contribution.

Young people need to see there are people just like them in all walks of life, in all workplaces and in all communities who’ve been through the experiences that they’re going through. They need to see it will be okay and they can have successful lives too.

When I first went to university I was still struggling to come out. It led me to drop out halfway through my first term and go away to run a French campsite. I built up my confidence and returned to a different university determined to be out from day one. Now I’m here today, it’s good to feel empowered and to be in a position to help change things. What’s the point otherwise?
Paul is a senior pharmaceutical microbiologist at GlaxoSmithKline. His career at GSK spans 22 years and he now manages a team in drug development putting new medicines out to market.
Positive role models are so important. They give you hope and help you frame who you are in relation to the world around you.

As human beings we look to others to influence our development and it can be tough if there isn’t anybody around you who relates to how you see yourself. If you can only see success as straight, white and male, and you don’t fit that description, it’s rather difficult. I think that’s why science rarely feels like a natural habitat for women and it’s certainly a very rare environment for gay people.

I realised from an early age that there was something different about me. I come from the North of England. Dad was a miner and I grew up with a Methodist background – not the most fertile territory for gay rights.

When you’re in a situation of isolation there are two options. You can either retreat or you can toughen up. I tried retreating for a few years and it didn’t get me anywhere.

Finally, I got to a tipping point where the fear and uncertainty of moving forward was better than living with the pain of isolation. I made tentative steps towards coming out with friends at university and gained confidence from their positive reactions.

It was just like somebody threw open a window. Instead of this deafening inner voice saying, ‘Something’s really wrong here’, I found the sense of perspective I needed to look at the world in a much more balanced and relaxed way. It still took me a while to come out at work until finally one Friday, before heading to London for Pride, I found myself avoiding questions about what I was doing at the weekend. Then it struck me that I was applying a double standard. So I told people and it was a revelation.

My manager said ‘So what?’ and people around me were, by and large, incredibly supportive.

I have a sense of self-reliance that comes from those early dark days. Now I’m in a very privileged position at the forefront of microbiology. I can change the way we do things and I’ve been able to do that on an international level. That’s come about because I’ve had the confidence to do what I believe is right and not just follow others.

By being who I am I’ve been able to channel my energies into what matters. I don’t have to maintain a façade that is ultimately self-defeating and attacks my integrity. It’s allowed me to move forward in my career.

If you can’t be who you are, it creates distance and disqualifies you from being embraced as an equal member of the team. The days of the maverick scientist having a brainwave at the bench and seeing that right through to the launch of a brand new medicine are long gone. If GSK is to keep succeeding as an organisation, we have to make progress as a team.

It took me a number of years to have the confidence to set up a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans network at work. I think it’s vital that gay staff feel connected and included. I was inspired by the fact we already had one in the US and I felt it was incredibly important to have a similar group in the UK.

My sexual orientation isn’t how I want to be defined but it isn’t something I want out of the equation either. I don’t want to cut myself off. As a biologist, I know most organisms are better off when they connect with each other. They know that sticking together gives them an advantage. Even bacteria don’t exist individually.

“I’ve had the confidence to do what I believe is right and not just follow others.”

Paul Newby
Liz is Managing Partner for People at Ernst & Young where she leads the firm’s agenda for attracting, developing and retaining talent across the UK and Ireland. In her 25-year career at Ernst & Young she was previously Head of Restructuring.
M y career has been a game of two halves. There’s ‘pre-coming out’ and then there’s ‘post-coming out’.

Before coming out I was very unclear about what I wanted to achieve in my career so, to me, work was just a job. Then I had my first serious lesbian relationship and in a very positive way it completely turned my world upside down. I came out to myself but didn’t have the confidence to be out at work. I didn’t forge any particular friendships and I really kept my private life separate. I wasn’t officially out, there was lots of rumour and gossip and it was a very tense time.

Then one day my boss asked if my flatmate and I were in a relationship. The question startled me. And yet I felt this overwhelming sense of relief. It was a turning point: I could have lied but I chose not to. I was tired of the subterfuge. At the end of the conversation I still asked him to keep it private as I felt it didn’t affect my work.

His response was: ‘I think you’re wrong, Liz. I think it does affect your work. It affects your work really positively. You’ve become so much more effective with your team and your clients since you’ve been happier at home.’

Here was my introduction to authentic leadership and from that point on I flourished. Melodramatic, I know, but it was like I’d been living in a gloomy room with the curtains closed and suddenly someone threw them open.

I reflected on my strengths and found the courage to act on my mum’s old saying: ‘If you aim for the moon, you might hit the top of a tree.’ I stopped treating work as a job and I really started thinking about the idea of a career. I operate in the restructuring arena, often when an organisation is in distress. Clients have got to choose who’s going to help them out of the mess. They base this big decision on their gut feeling and you’ve just got to be able to bring your whole self into the room. It gives them that extra degree of assurance. I’m accused of wearing my heart on my sleeve – and maybe I do – but I think people feel more able to take a risk with me because they know who I am. People intuitively know if you’re hiding something and my clients get to know me as someone who’s genuinely committed to their success.

I’ve drawn on different aspects of different people to shape how I reflect on my own approaches. My first boss was a very ambitious guy whose strategy was to surround himself with other bright, ambitious, challenging individuals.

My current boss has an ability to paint pictures and tell stories that get people engaged very quickly. They’re not up on a pedestal but they role model the particular things that they do really well themselves. Role modelling is pretty personal. You’ve got to invest time and not just get up on a podium every now and then because it’s the day-to-day engagement with people that encourages them to flourish.

It requires a willingness to be a bit brave and to know your approach won’t work for everyone. But, actually, if you can move 50 per cent of the people you’re talking to, or even just one person, that’s a success. I think a role model is someone who is sufficiently self-aware to understand that they have the power to impact others positively and who is selfless enough to take time bringing people on.

People, like me, in very visible senior leadership roles need to own up to themselves and say: ‘You’re a role model. Get over it!’
Noel is an Associate Vice President in Fixed Income Sales at Barclays Capital. He graduated in Economics and Law from Cambridge in 2008 and is an alumnus of the Stonewall Leadership Programme.
When I was studying for my A-levels I was also competing in equestrianism. My family did not have much money so we bought cheap horses and invested time into training them. One was pretty much saved from the meat-man and, eventually, we ended up competing at the top levels. That was the proof for me that hard work can get you anywhere and I have faced all my challenges in life believing that.

My dad encouraged that same attitude with my education. If I wanted to break away I could do it through education and hard work.

I was brought up in an old coal mining town near Manchester that had big structural unemployment problems. I went to the local comprehensive: an underperforming school with three full time police officers. I’d overreact when gay stuff came up and talk about who was the fittest girl around the football group so they wouldn’t guess I was gay.

I remember being petrified about being asked to read out loud in class because I worried about whether my voice sounded camp or not. I learned how to bottle up my emotions and closed myself off. I see the ‘It Gets Better’ videos on YouTube and I relate to what kids are going through. And I totally agree. It does get better.

In many ways, a high school friend was an early role model. I really didn’t have the greatest time until I got to sixth form when I made a different, nicer group of friends who I felt able to come out to.

I was at a New Year’s Eve party playing ‘Truth or Dare’ when he told me he was gay. I just started shaking and thinking: ‘It’s now or never.’ And I said: ‘I think I am too’.

From then on we were there for one another. He was six foot five and wasn’t afraid to wear nail polish and green crushed velvet to our school leavers’ party. He was just so confident. Before I met him I didn’t really know any gay people and, without him, I think I’d have felt like a lone ranger breaking down frontiers by myself.

I’ve been at Barclays for over three years now. For me seeing other lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the workforce is incredibly important.

They give people hope that if they’ve done it, I can do it. Jeff Davis, the Head of our LGBT Spectrum network in the US and our Head of Equity Business and Market Strategy, is a visible senior out leader who injects a lot of confidence in me and has become my mentor. I see it as a part of who I am and it’s something I’m proud of.

“I don’t want to hold anything back. I want to bring my whole self to work and I find that being open helps me to develop more meaningful relationships with people.”

I’m willing to open up and show others who I am and I make an effort to connect with them. I don’t want to hold anything back. I want to bring my whole self to work and I find that being open helps me to develop more meaningful relationships with people.

Today, I’m also a mentor for a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender charity helping young homeless people. I’m paired with a 16-year-old boy who’s an asylum seeker from Algeria. He’s super bright and my role is to be there to encourage him to believe in himself.

People have said I should manage his expectations about what’s actually achievable but, given my own experience, I’m completely unwilling to dampen his ambition.
Edward is a councillor in the City of London where he chairs the Licensing Committee and is also a Justice of the Peace. He is chairman of two public bodies, Local Partnerships and Capital Ambition, and is on the executive of LGBT+ Liberal Democrats.
never had the ‘great adolescent coming out’ and indeed openly identified as gay from the moment I arrived at university. For me, the drama happened at 31 when I told my friends that, actually, I am bisexual. Some were incredibly supportive but others found it unacceptable or felt betrayed that I wasn’t exclusively gay. That hurt a lot and it still does. One previously very close friend has not really spoken to me since 2003.

It’s the reality of my life that I find both genders attractive. My own announcement had become a necessity as I was, for the first time, publicly dating a woman; herself a formerly lesbian-identifying bisexual. I had fallen in love with a woman and we started living together. For the first time, I had to bring my bisexuality out in the open, especially with my closest (mainly gay) friends. Before that I had managed to hide my true sexuality within the broader gay closet, only openly dating guys, while secretly finding women attractive. It was a real bind and that’s why I think being open about being bisexual is the right thing to do. I still fear that there is a perception within our community that bisexuality doesn’t exist, that it’s just a phase on the way to becoming gay or that it’s somehow wrong. I’ve had very deep and meaningful relationships with both men and women. So I want to send a clear message that if you find yourself being attracted to people of both genders then it is okay to say you are bisexual.

My sexual orientation has been a catalyst in making me acutely aware of difference and its importance in society. In the City of London we have over a hundred different nationalities working within one square mile. We are correctly perceived as an area of great wealth and yet also have three social housing estates within the City’s boundaries. Another little known fact is that the City has among the highest proportion of same-sex couples for the size of population. When I was elected to the City of London Corporation, there were some extremely old-fashioned views about sexual orientation and they still exist to a certain extent.

The City hosts State banquets and other major national events at Guildhall and Mansion House and up until nine years ago there was an explicit rule that you could only bring a guest of the opposite sex. I’m quite counter-cultural and I would often attend with butch lesbian friends who would wear dinner jacket or evening tails. This was my small statement that I was queer and so were my friends. As expected, there was a negative reaction from some people but plenty of others said: ‘Fantastic, keep on doing it.’

My definition of a role model is informed by the fact that I work in politics and the public arena and I think that role models are appropriate to you, your profession and your ambitions. So, for me, a role model is someone who has a public profile and is willing to be proudly identified with things that they believe in. My own role models include my City colleague, Alderman Simon Walsh, who has held a number of leadership positions, and Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservative Party leader, both of whom have been openly gay throughout their public careers. The fact that they are gay is important but it is also incidental because I think that, regardless of sexual orientation, they will still stand up for what’s right and fair. I like to think I do the same.
Sally is a Senior Managing Consultant at IBM and chair of the company’s UK chapter of the EAGLE LGBT network. Prior to joining IBM, her global career includes software consultancy in Silicon Valley and service in the Royal Air Force.
When I say that I left the Air Force, I really mean I was thrown out for being a lesbian. It all seems so archaic.

I was on the fast track to becoming a senior officer when I was posted to the remotest part of the Shetlands with 200 single men and only one other woman. I fell in love and that was it. Naïve and risky but it was also rather exciting. I pretty much immediately came out so it was a strange mix of being with people who were completely accepting, or just didn’t care, versus knowing I was in an environment where I was committing an offence by being in love. Losing my job was an almost inevitable conclusion.

My sexual orientation had, therefore, a fundamental impact on my career and it still continues to influence it now. Take working globally, for instance. When you’re in an IBM building, you’re in IBM. Our global non-discrimination policies have to be implemented in every jurisdiction and that’s that. It’s not always entirely comfortable but I can shape those experiences abroad by having the conversation about my sexual orientation whenever I have reasonable opportunity.

Once, I was working on a project in Singapore and on the way back from lunch I bumped into a woman in the lobby who I’d met at a conference in Los Angeles. It was all typical gay hugs and kisses and ‘Oh my god!’ right in the middle of Singapore – surrounded by people who’d minutes before only known me as ‘The Uptight Brit’. I’d known her only from our work on lesbian and gay issues but it turns out she’s a very senior legal counsel. After the hug-fest, one of my team asked how I knew her and I said: ‘She heads up the Asia Pacific LGBT group and I head up the one in the UK’. Suddenly I was the hero of the piece; I could pick up the phone and have a direct line to one of the key influencers in the region. Gay is one of the top three things which I’d use to describe me. Our employee network group and sponsoring Stonewall’s Education for All Conference have meant a lot. But it’s definitely dropping down the list: mother and breadwinner are up there before gay. Being a mother has consumed all my oxygen and spare energy. Being a gay parent, you’ve still got to come out all the time so people really do understand that it’s two women and you’re both mothers. You’re utterly invisible. People subconsciously think: ‘Children: heterosexual.’ It can be frustrating but you just have to be really clear and explicit about it.

That openness and fearlessness is characteristic of the way I communicate and it serves me well at work. People see me as a mother and a career woman and a lesbian. I’m open and honest about my whole life. I remember being paired with an IBM executive in a workshop about flexible working. He was working a four-day week and when I asked him about weekends how he spent his fifth day, he began thinking doubly hard and crafting his responses very carefully. He worked at his church on the fifth day. It can be just as hard to come out as a Christian.

Authenticity means something to everyone not just lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. My corporate profile picture is me and my little boy wearing our IBM rainbow t-shirts, taken at Pride.

That’s how some senior person remembers to look up ‘Sally Drew’ when they need a technology expert on their next piece of work. That’s my corporate image. In my experience this appeals to people who are running the best, most interesting and innovative projects. That’s who I want to work with and they want to work with me.
Sheldon is Director of Mergers at the Office of Fair Trading. An alumnus of the Stonewall Leadership Programme, he is a competition lawyer with experience in the private sector in the City of London and more recently in the public sector.
I’m a black gay man and it’s obvious that I’m black from the colour of my skin. Some might say it’s obvious that I’m gay but others might not.

From the outset of my career, I’ve been open about my sexuality. On my first application to be a trainee solicitor I put down that I was Vice President of my university gay society. Identity and where I’m from is important. I want to have it out there in order for people to understand who I am, and for me to understand who they are, so we can work well together.

I come from a background where there weren’t many professionals – I was the second in my family to go to university – so coming out has really been a factor in building my professional life. Many of my gay professional friends, gay professors and other gay lawyers have helped me along in my career journey.

They’ve signposted me to opportunities and been around to bounce ideas off. One of my first professors, Richard Whish, was a real role model for me. He wrote the leading text on my specialism, competition law. He’s carved out a career as an extremely well respected practitioner and he’s done it in a way that meant he hasn’t compromised his sexual orientation or who he is. Seeing that gave me the confidence to really believe that I could progress.

Then as my career took off I found people started coming to me for advice and support. I’ve been asked for guidance by such a wide range of people, I get the impression they think I must have learnt something about getting over hurdles because I’m black, I’m gay and I’m Welsh! I can help people to explore their choices but I do feel a sense of responsibility that I could have an impact, in a small way, on somebody’s career progression.

It can be difficult because I don’t want to impose my view of the world. Everybody is different and that’s something to be taken seriously.

Being a role model is, I believe, very much linked to leadership. A leader has to take decisions and as a role model you decide to put yourself out there. It’s something to do with relationships. Putting yourself out there in a position where you’re vulnerable somehow breaks down barriers and some of the cynicism that can exist in the workplace.

Sometimes there are limits and restrictions on disclosure: with clients from countries where homosexuality may not be legal, for instance. That said, if somebody openly asks then I have a tendency always to be honest. Being open and truthful about yourself endears you to all sorts of people. If somebody has that courage to step up and be themselves then just think what they can do with clients and deliver for the organisation. I’m in no doubt that engaging absolutely everybody in your workforce opens the doors to growing your business and creating a better profile and reputation.

To be a good leader in today’s environment you’ve got to be able to work through others; knowledge and wisdom are so dispersed among people and you just can’t do everything.

When you allow yourself to be that kind of authentic leader, you get appreciation and you build networks. You also choose to assist and advise people. Then there’s also something about perseverance and having the drive to get things accomplished. Finally there’s something about trust. The hardest thing about leadership is gaining the trust of others. You’ve got to find trust and faith in being yourself. People will always respond well to that.
Liz is Chief Executive of Disability Rights UK. A commissioner for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, her career has included senior policy and leadership roles with Mind and the Disability Rights Commission.
I think there are huge parallels with being lesbian, gay or bisexual and the non-visible experiences of disabled people. I’ve had so many conversations with people who aren’t sure whether they should be open about their diagnosis of multiple sclerosis or the fact that they’re living with HIV or cancer.

It’s about how you want to identify yourself, who you want to talk with, in what terms, when and how. I think it was probably the lesbian, gay and bisexual world that first articulated what coming out, in any sense, is all about.

What’s always been particularly important in my own career is the idea that we don’t need to accept the world as it’s defined right now. I was involved in women’s mental health in the 1990s. Much was happening around the politics of gender and sexual orientation and that period in my career gave me this sense that change is always possible. We were challenging fixed definitions of ‘normal’: for instance that successful rehabilitation of women meant conformity with standard female roles. And homosexuality had only just been declassified as a mental illness, too.

There were crossovers between the way that gay people’s lives showed that there were different ways of living and how those of us involved in mental health and disability were challenging norms of ‘perfection’. We were saying that we were living different lives and that we belonged too. We argued that those of us experiencing mental health problems needed not just cure or care but to be free from discrimination, to have the opportunity to participate fully in society. You have to feel that you can be yourself.

Feeling you can be as open as you want to be is, I think, a very freeing experience and a very powerful one. Role modelling is a very positive form of leadership. It’s about being brave. Not in a terribly heroic way, but in being prepared to be different and to use your own experience in offering other options for doing things. That kind of integrity and courage goes hand-in-hand with people being open about their own lives. It can be an incredibly powerful influence on the national or international stage and it’s just as influential when it happens at work. I can think of people I’ve worked with who themselves draw on their own values and beliefs in the way they lead, in the way they manage, in the way they influence and in the way they encourage. Being honest about what I believe made me feel braver and more confident and I think those feelings become self-sustaining and self-reinforcing.

My own openness at work coincided with the shifts we’ve seen in political and social attitudes. The more things changed the more open and confident I and many others became.

As a manager in the 1990s, I was very conscious that there were younger gay and lesbian colleagues around me and I decided to be open to them about my sexual orientation. It was important they knew of other gay people and that we were all working in an organisation that was going to be positive. So there’s something quite straightforward about role modelling. It’s simply to do with demonstrating there are different ways of living, of working, of operating.

I don’t believe it needs to be incredibly overt and it’s not always about being very senior either. Certainly, it’s not about being that extraordinary individual who, in the disability world, might triumph over tragedy by venturing to the North Pole six times. It’s an awful notion that the only variety of person who counts as a role model is super-human. The vast majority of people can’t identify with that. Good role models are, in my opinion, far more ordinary.
Sarah is a Senior Manager in Accenture’s Talent and Organisation business. As a committee member and previous chair of its LGBT Network, she has worked with Accenture since 2007 and is an alumnus of the Stonewall Leadership Programme.
I think as someone who’s gay and female, you have to really consider how you’re going to tell your story. I was born and grew up in the UK but my first job was in the US. From when I started as a 21-year-old, sitting in a little office cubicle in Atlanta, Georgia – a very Southern, conservative state – I became very comfortable with my story and where I wanted to go as a professional.

I’ve been out since I was 17 and comfortable with being a lesbian since the start of my career. In my first job I had no problem being out with my close colleagues but I didn’t champion a cause or take part in any kind of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans activities.

About five months before I left the US, we had a typical American team bonding session and I told my story because I felt that these people ought to know all of me, not just a part of me. At the end, people came up to me and said: ‘I had no idea. This is so great because I’ve never heard anybody talk about that kind of stuff in the workplace before’. I realised that this was quite powerful, so perhaps I should be doing it more.

Until I came to Accenture, I struggled to find a lesbian, gay or bisexual person, in an office environment, who I could really look up to and who’s been able to steer me. And if I struggled with that, a comfortably out lesbian, how on earth does that work for those who aren’t comfortable in their sexuality?

I think you want to have some kind of reference point in an organisation. A signpost. Someone saying: ‘This is who I am and this is how I got here.’ When I moved back to the UK, I actively sought an employer who reflected my values of transparency and accessibility, and that employer was Accenture. I was interviewed three times, each time by very strong senior women who were passionate about these values. It confirmed that Accenture was right for me.

Now, I’m trying to emulate the characteristics that I’ve admired in managers and leaders. My first boss was a straight woman and her concern for the people who worked for her was obvious. She was wholly authentic and you always knew where you stood with her. Then there was the Chief Operating Officer. What I liked about him was that he was passionate about his job and he was also passionate about the people who worked for the company.

Finally there was my last boss, a strong, fairly senior woman who was, again, straight. She was incredibly motivated and wanted to move up the company quickly. Her passion for people was evident in everything she did: she knew all her 300 staff by name.

I think men are more likely to say they’re a role model than women. Women will credit their team for good results and they don’t like how ‘role model’ seems to put them on a pedestal. I don’t want people to stand on a pedestal. I just want people to be available to others and transparent about the things they’ve achieved. It’s okay if you don’t want to be that person on a soap box. It helps if you break it down and say that every gay person, no matter their level in the organisation, can be a role model by being transparent and talking about the good and the bad.

When they look at me, I want people to be able to see an openly gay female, so that they can say: ‘You know what? I can get there too’. I think I’ve worried in the past about being seen as ‘the lesbian on campus’ but, actually, I don’t think you can be ‘too gay’ or too much like yourself.
Liam is Head of Perry Beeches School, Birmingham. Under Liam’s guidance, Perry Beeches has become the most improved school in the UK, ever, with a 53% increase in students gaining five or more A-C grade GSCEs in four years. In 2011, the Times Educational Supplement named Perry Beeches ‘Overall Outstanding National School of the Year’.
Am I happy? I’m a head teacher and I love my role. I couldn’t run an institution which is about success, openness and pride in young people if I was hidden, closeted and frightened.

I absolutely love being an out gay man. Has it ever stopped me achieving anything? No. It absolutely has not. If anything, I’d say the ‘outness’ of being a gay man has pushed and encouraged me to go even further.

I’m from an Irish Catholic family of 11 children and I was always seen as different to the others. I’ve always known I’m gay even when I didn’t have the word for it. I was artistic, always flamboyant, outgoing and popular. I spent three years in junior seminary training to be a priest and, then, when it closed I went to an inner-city comprehensive. The change was shocking. I remember a real sense of moral indignation about how the quality of education could vary.

I headed down to London to study and, like many of us, ‘came out’ in response to Section 28. It was a time of protest, choosing to march and refusing to be oppressed. While this was going on my sister was using bribery, trying to make me break up with my partner. He was 21 and I was 19, so there was an age of consent issue that she played on, very nastily, at the time.

We decided to tell our parents and it was absolutely life changing. I remember standing on the doorstep, my mum answering and then saying: ‘What’s up?’ I was crying. She was asking if I was hurt or if I’d got a girl pregnant. I said: ‘I’m gay.’ From that day my parents cut me off. I haven’t seen them since I was 19.

I’ll always remember what that was like and I can’t have anything like that happen to the students I teach and lead. It’s a major driver in who I am and what I do. Being an out gay man is a great thing, it’s a successful thing. I’m a role model for them and the community I serve. I don’t wake up every morning and go: ‘I’m the gay head teacher.’

But I am the head teacher of the most successful school in the country – and I’m a gay man. I’m talking to the Department for Education and the Education Secretary’s office. I have regular contact at that sort of level. And we can make a difference just by saying: ‘This person is hugely successful in his field and he’s an out gay man – what are you concerned about?’

I arrived at a failing school. Frightened people, riots in the corridors and academic success barely on the radar. Being an out gay man helped ‘clear the decks’. It meant someone was leading the school who said: ‘This is who I am and I have no hidden agenda. I’m not closeted in any sense.’

The young people were initially wary but they were able to come and ask me questions and that started to change the picture. Then they started challenging each other. And now it’s an absolute norm: ‘Our head teacher’s great. He’s gay. So what?’

I was speaking recently to the mother of a black lad in Year 9. We were talking about images of young black people in Birmingham and the stereotyping they face. She said: ‘Well you’re an out gay man. You know what it’s like when people stereotype.’

I realised the importance of being a role model for anyone who’s part of a minority, whether it’s their colour, that they’re in a wheelchair or because they’re gay. It’s about supporting everyone to be who they are and to feel that being different is a great thing.
Emmeline is a Senior Electrical Engineer for Arup and co-chair of the Gay Women’s Network black and minority ethnic group. Her career started in Perth, Australia, and moved to London in 2007. Previously at Norman, Disney & Young, she specialised in the design and management of major computer data centres.
I’m not really a fan of the limelight but outside work I’m co-chair of Gay Women’s Network – Multicultural, supporting our ethnic minority members. It enables me to bring together my identities as a professional, a gay woman and having a multicultural background.

I was brought up in Singapore. I knew I didn’t fit in even though I didn’t fully understand why. I was aware of homophobia in society and misconceptions about lesbian, gay and bisexual people. I heard openly homophobic comments from teachers.

I knew I had to leave. Inside I knew I was gay but I pushed it away and, as a result, I started showing physical symptoms that I wasn’t coping. I went to study in Perth before joining a student exchange programme at the University of California and, by chance, I managed to pick quite possibly the gayest school in the world. I was just blown away by how normal it was to be gay there.

I was suddenly around lesbian, gay and bisexual people – professors or heads of houses and colleges – who were successful and openly gay. It had a huge impact on me. I came out there and it was just like flipping a switch in my head which said: ‘Actually, I’m alright. There’s nothing wrong with me. So what if I’m gay? I’m still me and it’s okay.’

Since then my sexual orientation has played a huge part in some of my career decisions. I studied engineering so I really had two choices. One was to work in the mining industry where I’d earn about five times my current salary. The other was to go into an engineering company based in the city. In the end, I didn’t think the mines would suit me because I was gay. I’d left Singapore because of my sexuality so why would I want to put myself back in that kind of situation again? I wanted to be in a city full of gay-friendly people and this lay quite firmly behind my decision to move from Perth to London. Here, my professional life hasn’t been affected in a negative sense; at work people notice my ability before my sexual orientation. I don’t have gay stickers around my desk but I don’t hide it either. I want to portray myself as capable. I don’t want to be judged by my sexual orientation but at the same time it’s such a big part of me that I’m not going to hide it. I’ve only very recently joined ARUP and it’s important to me that I continue to bring my authentic self to work. Already I’m looking forward to working with the nominated diversity champion at ARUP – it’s the first time I’ve come across one in an engineering firm!

I think being a role model is about awareness of oneself and noticing the impact you have on the people around you. Often we just keep running in our daily lives and we just aren’t aware enough. I view people as role models when I see virtues in them that I respect myself: honesty, compassion, wisdom and kindness.

It all comes back to authenticity and not trying to hide my imperfections; there were four lesbian CEOs on a panel at a recent Gay Women’s Network event and it struck me that it hadn’t been a smooth path for any of them either. They’d taken risks and they’d experienced failures too. It was evidence that you don’t have to be perfect to make it to the top.

emmeline tang
Daniel is the Head of International Capital Markets and the Diversity & Inclusion Partner at the law firm CMS Cameron McKenna LLP. He is the founder of the InterLaw Diversity Forum, an organisation linking the LGBT networks of law firms, as well as founder of the Forum for US Securities Lawyers in London, which deals with the application of US securities law in the London market.
I'd always felt my sexual orientation was a disadvantage but I absolutely believe that conquering adversity builds strength.

I was raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, in a Jewish family who were Holocaust survivors. In that very conservative Republican environment I was already an outsider and being gay was a secret on top of that: a secret I didn't share with anyone. Prior to 1990, there was no visible gay media presence with the exception of those used as punchlines.

It just wasn't something on most people's radar, which didn't serve me well: not only did I personally not know of anyone who was gay, I also had no real sense of how many gay people existed anywhere. I feared people would reject me if they knew. Strangely, I was incredibly social and outgoing and got on with everybody yet I was an outsider without any close friends. It was lonely and isolating and I was pretty miserable at the start of high school. I wasn't clear on the reason for my unhappiness until one day a switch went off in my head and I realised: 'Oh, I'm gay.'

Coming to terms with it brought about a hugely positive change in my outlook. And the isolation let up when I found a teacher I could really relate to. Her name was Judith Silverman: Italian Catholic, very ethnic, giant hair – she looked just like Cher. She was different. She was a scandal in her own right and she sensed difference in me. She was gorgeous, incredibly bright, and a very demanding teacher who was tough on me.

At a time when the most I could do was just turn up to class, she refused to let me coast by on mediocre grades. She'd say: 'You're smart! You're bright! Why aren't you applying yourself?' So I dived into academics and she encouraged me to do more. I studied hard, got a great education at Washington University and ended up in New York at law school where I continued this habit of finding mentors and sponsors.

And they were women and men, gay and straight. They inspired me to expect more of myself. Many, if not most, people who have made it up the ladder have had people helping them. If you don't have someone pushing for you, you'll quite often find yourself limited in your ability to move up within an organisation. My mentors went out of their way to help me to the next level. The Dean of my law school used his contacts to find me my first summer placement. In that summer placement, I worked under the head of international law who ended up being instrumental in landing me my first firm job. These were big reciprocal endorsements for my hard work and loyalty.

Later I came across gay people who had the power to affect me by simply being both out and highly visible. When I first moved to London our head of banking in New York was openly gay. We didn't have a close personal relationship but I took his mere presence as a positive sign for me and my potential career in the firm.

Tim Hailes at JPMorgan was a role model long before he became a mentor. Seeing Tim on the front page of The Lawyer trying to drive home the importance to client banks of gay equality in law firms was a huge turning point in my career – it provided the impetus to found the InterLaw Diversity Forum.

As a partner I’m aware of the power and responsibility I have to help those around me, both directly and by example. And it’s an obligation I take seriously. I don’t even need to know the people I’m helping. It all goes back to the fact that, not so long ago, people helped me.
top ten tips

1. **Recognise the importance of role models.** Lesbian, gay and bisexual role models help to attract talent. They demonstrate that you take diversity seriously. Authentic role models challenge conventional perceptions, forge stronger client relationships and bring alternative perspectives to decision-making.

2. **Visible role models help show the way for others.** It’s much harder to be what you can’t see. If there are no out lesbian, gay or bisexual role models at work, how can other gay people be sure they’ll be able to progress? Visible role models demonstrate organisational credibility around diversity.

3. **Effective role models demonstrate self-awareness and authenticity.** They think about who they are, the values they stand for and the way in which they want to impact on others. This is a continuing process, encouraged by their employers.

4. **A range of role models in an organisation enables people to come up with a mix that works for them.** People rarely want to emulate a single person – they want to pick and choose qualities they admire from a number of role models.

5. **Organisations need role models at all levels.** People at the top can champion and set direction. Managers can create a welcoming and supportive workplace. Those at the beginning of their careers can role model the benefits of being out at work from day one.

6. **Good role models encourage and develop others.** They like contributing to high performance in colleagues and never see it as a threat. They appreciate authenticity and don’t want to create clones – they get a kick from helping others to develop their own voice and talents.

7. **If you’re openly gay at work, you’re a role model whether you like it or not.** The only real choice is how good you want to be at it. Acknowledging your potential to influence those around you means you’re better placed to make informed choices about using that influence constructively.

8. **Good role models are courageous and take risks.** They’re willing to step out from the crowd rather than playing it safe. This doesn’t have to be a grand gesture – sometimes it’s more about just being themselves.

9. **Good role models don’t want to be defined just by their sexual orientation.** They think it’s an important part of who they are – just like other dimensions of their identity such as gender, ethnicity, disability and culture.

10. **No one’s perfect!** Really good role models don’t edit out the bumps and scars they’ve acquired along the way. As a result, they’re seen as a richer source of learning.
resources

Stonewall Workplace programmes

Stonewall Leadership Programme
An intensive and inspirational two-day residential course for rising lesbian, gay and bisexual professionals.
www.stonewall.org.uk/at_work

Stonewall Diversity Champions programme
Stonewall’s Diversity Champions programme is Britain’s good practice forum through which major employers work with Stonewall and each other on sexual orientation issues to promote diversity in the workplace.
www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs

Workplace Equality Index
The Workplace Equality Index is Stonewall’s comprehensive annual benchmarking exercise that showcases Britain’s top employers for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff.
www.stonewall.org.uk/wei

Stonewall Workplace research
Peak Performance: Gay people and productivity
The Double-Glazed Glass Ceiling: Lesbians in the workplace

Stonewall Workplace Guides
Procurement, Straight Allies, Marketing, Religion and Sexual Orientation, Bisexual People in the Workplace, Career Development, Bullying, Monitoring, Network Groups

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Role Models