



*OutNEXT:  
Power of  
OutVANTAGE™*



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# Introduction

Navigating the workplace can present unique challenges for LGBTQ+ employees. **This guide offers practical strategies to help professionals thrive, covering key topics such as embracing authenticity, building strong relationships, seeking mentorship, and taking initiative.** Through actionable insights and inspiring examples, this resource equips you to navigate your career with confidence, contribute meaningfully, and succeed while staying true to yourself.

This guide represents a **key output from the OutNEXT 2024 Global Summit**, capturing the discussions, debates, and insights of over 200 LGBTQ+ emerging leaders. It reflects their collective efforts toward advancing equality and shaping a future where LGBTQ+ talent thrives.

As the first global talent accelerator for LGBTQ+ business leaders, OutNEXT helps rising professionals lead with impact. **Since 2014, the program has engaged over 4,500 emerging leaders from more than 200 companies worldwide**, unlocking leadership skills through OutVANTAGE™, the competitive advantage of the LGBTQ+ experience.

With a curriculum designed in collaboration with McKinsey, **PwC, Harvard Business School, and LinkedIn**, OutNEXT offers high-impact workshops, networking events, and a social impact challenge. The goal is personal growth and creating inclusive workplace cultures that drive meaningful change.

**OutVANTAGE™ is a leadership framework developed by Out Leadership** to harness the unique skills of LGBTQ+ leaders, including resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. These traits, shaped by lived experience, enable leaders to foster inclusion and achieve strong business outcomes.



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*It reflects their collective efforts toward advancing equality and shaping a future where LGBTQ+ talent thrives.*





*Here are the  
key takeaways  
from OutNEXt  
2024 for LGBTQ+  
leaders in the  
workforce:*

# Be Yourself and Embrace Authenticity.

Authenticity is the key to thriving in the workplace. LGBTQ+ professionals often feel pressure to conform to a version of themselves that is more palatable to others, but this can lead to a disconnect between who they are and how they perform at work.

**By embracing your true identity, you open the door to more meaningful relationships with colleagues, contribute more effectively, and increase your overall job satisfaction.** Authenticity fosters creativity, trust, and collaboration, allowing you to approach challenges with more confidence and passion.

Companies with inclusive environments are more likely to support you in being your full, authentic self, which will lead to greater success both personally and professionally. When you show up as who you truly are, you're able to give more to your work and form connections that are based on mutual respect and understanding.

*“Don’t be afraid to be yourself! You show up authentically, you have a better work product and make more connections.”*

**Emily Thomson,**  
Analyst, Blackstone



*“Your authenticity is your superpower. You don’t owe anybody anything. Be undeniable in whatever you choose to do.”*

**Kevin Sokal,**  
Senior Associate, Real Estate Investing,  
Goldman Sachs Alternatives



During the summit, **Ken Ohashi, CEO of Brooks Brothers, shared his journey of embracing authenticity in leadership.** Ohashi discussed how coming out later in life allowed him to fully embrace his identity, which not only enhanced his personal well-being but also strengthened his leadership.

By leading authentically, Ohashi fostered an inclusive work environment at Brooks Brothers, reshaping the brand’s culture to be more reflective of modern values. His experience highlights that embracing who you truly are can have a transformative effect on both personal success and company culture.

# Find Your Safe People and Build a Support Network.

Building a network of trusted allies is essential for any professional, but it can be especially important for LGBTQ+ individuals. A support system helps you navigate both personal and professional challenges, and it provides a space where you can be yourself without fear of judgment.

**Safe people can include colleagues, mentors, and friends, all of whom can offer advice, emotional support, and guidance as you navigate your career.** This network also helps you build confidence, as it provides a buffer against the inevitable challenges that come with being an LGBTQ+ professional. OutNEXT is an excellent vehicle for building a robust network of ambitious and influential leaders.

Additionally, having a strong support network means you have allies who can advocate for you and amplify your voice in spaces where it may not always be heard. It's also essential to engage with individuals from different backgrounds, as this will broaden your perspective and help you grow personally and professionally.

*“Find your safe people and make as many friends as possible. Your community is bigger than you think.”*

**Nia Grant,**  
Project Coordinator, T. Rowe Price



*“Community has been the key to my survival and evolution. It embraced me and pushed me to be my truest and most authentic self.”*

**Jaymes Black,**  
CEO, The Trevor Project

Jaymes Black, CEO of The Trevor Project, emphasized the importance of community during the summit. Black shared how, at pivotal moments in his career, the LGBTQ+ community embraced them, offering support that helped them navigate challenges.

They noted that **finding your “safe people” provides a crucial foundation of confidence and security**, enabling you to thrive both personally and professionally. Black's story underscores that building a trusted network of allies, mentors, and colleagues is key to navigating the complexities of being an LGBTQ+ professional.

# Take Initiative and Get Involved.

Taking initiative is a crucial step in standing out and building a successful career. **For LGBTQ+ professionals, this often means proactively seeking out opportunities to get involved in causes or projects that align with your values.** Whether it's joining an Employee Resource Group (ERG), volunteering for a diversity and inclusion initiative, or spearheading new programs, showing that you're willing to take action will set you apart as a leader.

Being proactive not only demonstrates your commitment to the organization's goals, but it also helps you build a reputation as someone who cares about making a positive impact. Getting involved in causes that are important to you also helps create connections with others who share your passion, further expanding your professional network.

By taking initiative, you're not only contributing to your personal growth but also making your workplace a better, more inclusive environment. **This visibility can help accelerate your career and open doors for future leadership opportunities.**

*“Take initiatives to get more involved on causes that matter to you.”*

**Stanley Kong,**  
VP, TD Securities



*“Sometimes you’ve got to take a chance... If I could make it easier for even one person in Asia to walk into their team and be themselves then that was a win.”*

**Noel Quinn,**  
Former Group Chief Executive, HSBC

# Failure is a Stepping Stone to success.

Everyone makes mistakes, but the most successful professionals are those who learn from them. **For LGBTQ+ individuals, entering a workplace can come with additional pressures to prove oneself, which might lead to a fear of failure.** However, embracing mistakes as part of the learning process is key to growth. Each misstep offers an opportunity to refine your skills, learn new approaches, and become more resilient. By shifting your mindset to see mistakes as learning opportunities, you can reduce the anxiety around failure and focus on continuous improvement.

Employers appreciate professionals who are adaptable, willing to learn, and capable of growing from their experiences. Cultivating this growth mindset will help you not only overcome challenges but also position yourself as someone who is proactive in addressing and solving problems. **It's important to accept that perfection isn't required; what matters is your ability to bounce back and apply what you've learned in future situations.**



Billy Porter's discussion with Todd Sears highlighted resilience as a cornerstone for success. **Porter emphasized that overcoming adversity requires embracing one's mistakes and using them as learning experiences.** LGBTQ+ professionals often face systemic barriers, and developing resilience through failures is key to long-term career growth. Porter's story of perseverance in the entertainment industry serves as an inspiring example of turning setbacks into opportunities for self-growth.

*“Make mistakes and learn from them!”*

**Curt Ostosh,**  
Private Capital Transactions Associate  
(7Y), Ropes & Gray LLP



*“Lean into your adversities whether in your career or your personal life because they will come back full circle.”*

**Andres Martinez,**  
Relationship Manager, LinkedIn Sales Solutions

# Stay Curious and Continue Learning.

Curiosity is a powerful tool for professional development, and LGBTQ+ professionals should actively seek out opportunities to expand their knowledge.

Staying curious allows you to adapt to new trends and challenges in the workplace, making you more versatile and valuable as an employee. This is particularly important in industries that are constantly evolving, as continuous learning keeps you at the forefront of your field. **Being curious also means engaging with topics or areas of your industry that you may not be directly involved in**, but that could enhance your overall understanding of the business.

Taking the initiative to learn new skills, whether through formal training or by simply asking questions, shows employers that you are invested in your own growth and development. It also positions you as a **lifelong learner, which is an attractive trait in any professional**. The more you expand your knowledge, the more confident and capable you'll become in navigating the complexities of your career.

*“Be curious...find what you know little about in your new industry, firm, or role and then devour it.”*

**JD Schramm,**  
Founder, JD Schramm Communications



*“Resilience adaptability curiosity and drive—these are qualities our community excels at and they make us powerful leaders.”*

**Bachul Yoshimati Koul,**  
Value Creation & Portfolio Analytics,  
Warburg Pincus

The summit emphasized continuous learning as a critical trait for professional development. **JD Schramm’s “Lavender Diamond” model, which outlines four aspects of effective communication—clarity, confidence, competence, and connection**—shows how curiosity drives leadership development. Schramm stressed that storytelling, reframing challenges as learning opportunities, and always striving for improvement are essential for staying ahead in your career.



# Understand Workplace Optics and Perception.

How you are perceived in the workplace can have a significant impact on your career trajectory. LGBTQ+ professionals, like all professionals, need to be mindful of the optics surrounding their actions, behaviors, and relationships within the company.

While it's important to remain authentic, **understanding how others view you and your work can help you navigate office dynamics more effectively.** Being conscious of how your contributions are seen, how you interact with colleagues, and how you present yourself in meetings or public forums can help you build a positive reputation. This doesn't mean compromising who you are, but rather being strategic in how you manage your personal brand.

By understanding the nuances of workplace culture and **adjusting your approach where necessary,** you can avoid potential missteps and position yourself as a respected, valuable team member. Learning how to balance authenticity with a strong professional image is key to long-term success.

*“Work hard but also listen and be aware of what is happening around you/what people are saying about you – the optics of how you are perceived can make or break careers!”*

**Saurav Jung Thapa,**  
Senior Federal Affairs Manager,  
The Trevor Project

*“You don't need to take a position on the issue of the day but you can talk about in general, here's how these are my values.”*

**Mary Obasi,**  
Global Policy Advisory Executive,  
Bank of America



In the discussion on personal branding, Tag Warner, CEO of Gay Times, introduced the concept of **“chameleon leadership,”** where leaders adapt their presentation and style based on the context without compromising core values. This aligns with the idea of navigating workplace dynamics strategically, ensuring that personal brand perception remains aligned with long-term career goals while maintaining authenticity.



# Know Your Values and Story.

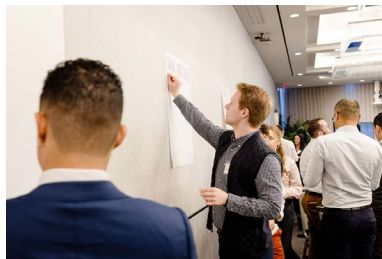
Your personal story is a powerful tool in shaping your professional journey. For LGBTQ+ professionals, being able to articulate your values and the experiences that have shaped you can create deeper connections with colleagues and leaders.

Knowing your story allows you to draw upon your experiences as a source of strength and clarity when navigating challenges. It's important to take time to reflect on what has brought you to where you are today and how your values inform your actions in the workplace. **Sharing your story authentically can also help build trust with others and create opportunities for collaboration and mentorship.**

Employers appreciate individuals who know who they are and what they stand for, as it signals confidence, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence. Being able to clearly articulate your values not only strengthens your professional relationships but also helps you stay grounded and focused on your long-term career goals.

*“Know your story, what’s gotten you to today, especially the values you’ve gleaned that you channel into your actions.”*

**Jonathan Hack,**  
Senior Consultant, EY



*“The superpower of being LGBT is in that process of recognizing difference and ultimately trusting yourself over the expectations of others.”*

**Brian Derrick,**  
Founder, Oath.vote



# Take Advantage of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are a valuable resource for LGBTQ+ professionals looking to build community, find mentorship, and advocate for inclusion within their organization. ERGs offer a space where you can connect with others who share similar experiences, making it easier to navigate challenges and celebrate successes. They also provide opportunities for leadership development, as **many ERGs involve organizing events, leading initiatives, and working closely with senior leaders to promote diversity and inclusion.**

Being active in an ERG allows you to contribute to creating a more inclusive workplace while also building your own professional skills and network. ERGs are often platforms for change within organizations, and **your involvement can help amplify the voices of marginalized groups.** Additionally, participating in ERGs can provide you with access to internal resources and support networks that may not be available elsewhere.

*“Take advantage of employee resource groups and allow your LGBTQ+ network to become a part of your strength in the workplace.”*

**Jason Carroll,**  
Associate, Apollo Global Management



*“I’m building a beloved community as a reminder where I don’t push anyone out of my heart, even those who do not agree with my existence.”*

**Anu Gupta,**  
Author of Breaking Bias,  
Founder and CEO of BE MORE



# Find the Right Organization for You.

Not all workplaces will be a perfect fit. LGBTQ+ professionals should seek out organizations that celebrate individuality and support diversity. If you don't feel comfortable being yourself at work, it may be time to look for a new opportunity.

A company that encourages authenticity and inclusion is one where you'll thrive, grow, and feel valued. **Sometimes, moving on is the best decision for your mental health and career success**, and it's worth finding an organization that aligns with your personal values.



*“I promised myself I would never lie about who I was or my family structure.”*

**Ken Ohashi,**  
CEO, Brooks Brothers

*“If you don't feel you can be yourself at your workplace, you are probably at the wrong workplace.”*

**Kevin Gannon,**  
Business Operations Manager, LinkedIn



# Thank you to all the OutNEXT 2024 Participants and Contributors who made this Report Possible.



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# About Out Leadership

**Out Leadership is the world's premier global platform for businesses to drive LGBTQ+ equality.**

We work closely with the world's leading companies to develop extraordinary talent, produce cutting-edge research, advance powerful advocacy, and improve business outcomes.

Out Leadership is a **certified B Corporation**, which means we have voluntarily met the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose.



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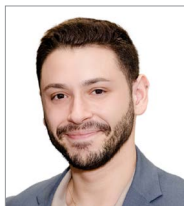
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OutNEXT is one of  
the most powerful cohorts  
of LGBTQ+ leaders  
in the world.

*What will you do with your platform?*