

Leading as an LGBTQIA+ Member: Inclusivity versus tolerance, freedom of expression, and advice for the C-suite

The award-winning 2014 Pride in London #FreedomTo campaign was London Pride's first-ever advertising campaign. The campaign prompted people to share their #FreedomTo messages on social media, with entries displayed on out-of-home screens across London, as well as on the side of buses as part of the London Pride event.

Temps de lecture : minute

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This is really where the story of DOOH.com, a creative digital out-of-home studio, started, 10 years ago, when CEO Andrew Newman and CCO Neil McKenney joined forces on this legendary campaign, one that was dear to both of their hearts as members, and leaders who are also a part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

As we finish off Pride month, Andrew and Neil share their thoughts on being a leader whilst also being in the LGBTQIA+ community, as they delve into why moving beyond mere tolerance to true inclusivity matters, how freedom of expression can transform corporate culture and advice to other executives on leading with compassion.

Inclusivity vs. Tolerance

Reflecting on our careers in the industry, we recall the former initiatives in

the workplace for anyone who was considered different, was to encourage 'tolerance'. Now, especially for Andrew as a CEO himself, he particularly strives to push beyond mere tolerance, into inclusivity.

Inclusivity carries deep significance beyond tolerating others, a concept that is lacking in its ability to respect individuals and all that they are. Instead, inclusivity should encompass a genuine appreciation and respect for everyone's unique backgrounds and contributions, regardless of sexual orientation, race or religion.

This philosophy of inclusivity should be central to a company's ethos, ensuring that respect for every individual is embedded in everything we do. It's not just about being seen—it's about being valued and understood.

Solidarity is another key concept that enhances our understanding of inclusivity. Recognising what it truly means to feel tolerated, gives us an understanding and empathy towards other minority groups and this general sense of empathy is woven into the fabric of a business. This understanding allows us to not only acknowledge but actively incorporate the value of every individual, fostering a workplace where everyone is truly integrated and respected.

Freedom of expression

When people feel seen and heard, they feel included, which brings a sense of freedom to the business environment. This freedom allows individuals to express themselves creatively and technically in a safe setting, which in a creative industry such as advertising is paramount. Consequently, businesses benefit greatly from fostering an atmosphere where everyone feels supported and free to share their ideas and skills.

With expression and a safe environment to express yourself, the next and

ultimately wonderful thing we witness at DOOH.com is seeing people comfortable to express their true authentic selves, without the need for concern or being judged.

Advice for the C-suite

At *DOOH.com*, we take pride in being an open-minded company that considers all minorities. It's crucial that we treat everyone equally and provide the same opportunities to all, ensuring a truly inclusive workplace. We can, however, lead by example in many ways, and this starts in the C-Suite.

Considering every minority

It's essential to ensure every minority group is considered and included. This commitment is why, at DOOH.com, we have worked diligently to improve female representation within the company, which has taken time but is critical to our business goals.

We acknowledge there's still work to be done to achieve full representation across the company, not just in terms of gender but for all minority groups, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and valued.

Making a conscious effort for all

Discussing topics like sexuality and pronouns can still be uncomfortable.

Assumptions are still frequently made about people's personal lives across the board, however, this is something members of the LGBTQIA+ people can truly relate to. It's often a deeply ingrained part of people's perceptions, similar to how we traditionally view gender. Pronouns, which are crucial for respect and identity, should be actively thought about, not decided by assumptions and are ultimately something people should be

mindful of in all conversations, whether that's business pitches or Zoom calls. We encourage our staff to include their pronouns in their email signatures to ensure everyone is addressed correctly, reflecting their identity. This practice is crucial as we strive to use language that respects and honours each individual's chosen identity.

Mental Health in work

As an individual and within a company, it's important to emphasise transparency about mental health. Using your own experiences is key to relating on a personal level with staff and can allow you to offer unique insights and advice. Neil is particularly open about his past challenges with mental health and living with anxiety daily.

Drawing upon personal challenges, Neil is a Mental Health Ally At DOOH.com - something that is made clear in his business email signature. This initiative invites employees to speak to Neil when they are struggling or if they just need a chat. This ensures that mental health issues are addressed, and by including this information in an email signature, it encourages open discussions, helping to destigmatise mental health and sexuality topics, which can still be taboo. This practice fosters a culture of openness and solidarity.

Moving forward, representation is key

Ensuring representation in our industry is crucial, especially since our influence is sometimes limited. While we advise clients on various issues, there are boundaries to how much we can guide them. Importantly, although we are not primarily a creative agency capable of influencing every aspect of a campaign, we strive to make a positive impact wherever possible.

Representation is always at the forefront of our efforts, as demonstrated

by initiatives like Outvertising, which Neil was previously involved with. This organisation plays a crucial role in urging brands and creatives to ensure their advertisements authentically reflect the entire LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Such organisations are essential for liaising with major brands and influencing stakeholders outside the industry, including the government, to ensure inclusivity starts at the top.

Although these resources pertain to advertising, in every industry it's important to work with those who share and uphold your same beliefs, and are also making strides to make their space more inclusive for all.

As leaders from the LGBTQIA+ community, we see the world and business through a unique lens. This perspective makes our leadership richer, helping us create spaces where people feel genuinely included and free to express themselves. C-suite executives should really lean into these ideas to build workplaces where everyone can succeed. By bringing our real-life experiences and values into the boardroom, we can lead authentically and make the business world more inclusive and vibrant.

Andrew Newman is CEO and Neil McKenney is CCO at [DOOH.com](https://www.doooh.com), a creative production studio specialising in all things Digital Out of Home.

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