

# **BREAKING THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING**

**June 14, 2019**

Vienna, Austria

## **Session: LGBTI ERGs: Just Copy, Paste and Start**

The first actors when 'breaking through the ceiling' are the LGBTI ERGs (Employee Resource Groups). Such LGBTI groups that work within a company have the power to influence the LGBTI agenda within their working environment. Setting-up and using an ERG is easier than you might think We are happy to share with you three positive experiences by ERGs and give you one advice, just copy & paste!



**Martin Mesenhuber**

Co-founder of the EMBRACE Network at Raiffeisen Bank International and member of BRich, Austria



**Raiffeisen Bank  
International**



**EMBRACE**

**LGBTI@RBI**

# EMBRACE: Building awareness

## OUTING AT THE WORKPLACE – IT STILL TAKES COURAGE

Around eight per cent of the European population is gay or lesbian. The RBI initiative “Diversity 2020” puts LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual) on the bank’s agenda. Colleagues report how much courage it takes to “come out” at the workplace and why they did it anyway.



Please contact us anytime if you would like to talk about LGBTI or be part of the LGBTI working group. We are happy to offer you a personal and confidential talk.

- Ingeborg Bauer-Kunst
- Valerie Brunner
- Liang Cheng
- Nina Diglas
- Markus Dorn
- Zsolt Földes
- Katerina Koule
- Anita Lang
- Beaone Leder
- Catherine Maggumbol
- Robert Mathew
- Birgit Mathiaschitz
- Catherine McGrath
- Martin Mesenhuber
- Gabor Mikloviczky
- Susanne Prager
- Pavel Subrt
- Ludo Swinnen
- Peter Wursch

**W**hat would happen to a soccer team composed of eleven goal keepers? They would not win many games, as a soccer team’s success depends on how well the different players form a team. Well, this logic also goes for our workplace. The more diverse the workforce of a company is, the better the overall results will be. Every company considering diversity as one of its core values will certainly profit from it. Decisions will improve and creativity increase, as well as loyalty and productivity of the staff, and the company will get a more contemporary and more up-to-date image, which is especially important in a time when the millennials are gradually taking over.

**There is no such thing as one coming-out, there are many** Two years ago, RBI started the initiative “Diversity 2020”. It covers the different aspects of diversity such as empowerment of women, how we deal with disabilities, how we treat different generations, and it also touches the position of the LGBTI<sup>1</sup> community. For some colleagues, this is still a sensitive, too personal, even strange

subject, but for others it is an existential issue, considering that around eight per cent of the European population is gay or lesbian. The personal contributions of the testimonials show how deeply some of your colleagues are affected and how much courage it still requires to cope with it. Every gay or lesbian person has a personal story to tell about his or her coming outs. Yes, it’s an activity in plural as you can come out to your family, to friends but also in your professional environment.

### Is it really still an issue?

One might still ask: is this really still an issue? Or is it not just a hype companies go for? Have these issues not been taken care of in the meantime? Well, the good news is that the LGBTI community has made huge progress in the past 30 years. Legislation in Austria and many other countries offers protection from discrimination; marriage, or at least same sex union, and adoption are open for LGBTI couples, and surveys confirm that social acceptance of gay men and lesbian women is high and still increasing. Conclusion, all is perfect? Sadly not. The actual status is not carved in stone,

and there are enough examples of countries where someone tries to turn the clock back. Also within RBI, many people are still afraid to come out and are forced to play a role, hiding their own personality, which naturally impacts the joy of working at RBI.

### ...until it is as irrelevant as the colour of your eyes.

By deciding to look after LGBTI and diversity RBI is living up to its social responsibility as a company. Following the impulse of Retail Diversity Ambassador Pavel Subrt, who is personally concerned by this topic, the spontaneous signs of interest coming from the RBI workforce were turned into a working group. It is open for all interested RBI colleagues, outed or not, gays, lesbians or straight allies<sup>2</sup>, everybody is welcome. In the workinggroup, suggestions to improve the integration of the LGBTI members within the bank are discussed, from improving administrative processes to helping colleagues with questions about the topic and to creating awareness among the RBI workforce and management. The aim of the LGBTI working group is to push the issue far, so that within RBI sexual orientation has become as insignificant as the eye colour.

<sup>1</sup> LGBTI = lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual

<sup>2</sup> a straight or heterosexual ally is a person who supports equal civil rights, gender equality or LGBTI movements

# EMBRACE: Building awareness

## PAVEL ŠUBRT



### What is your personal experience of being gay and working at RBI?

Fourteen years ago, each Monday before sunrise, I drove to work in Vienna for the week. Then, each Friday, long after sunset, I would arrive back in Prague. For me at that time, Prague was the safe haven representing my open private life, contrary to my Vienna work life. Only now do I see what double life illusions and unjustified fears one can be burdened with. Today, as an openly gay man, I stand proudly behind my coming out, and I want to see more diversity featured on the "staff matters" page of Raiffeisen INSIDE. I am now surrounded by so many wonderful colleagues, both in Vienna and at the network banks, who respect me for who I am and what I can do for the company. I cannot change my own journey, but I believe that I can help other colleagues making a similar journey easier. Let this be an appeal to every RBI employee: Listen to your colleagues, be curious and ask questions. There is an amazing rich life story behind every face you meet daily. Some things do not happen by themselves, they need to be helped along.

### Is there an economic value to LGBTI inclusion?

Yes, there is. Any company should be concerned with productivity lost at the workplace. From many studies we know that the estimated productivity loss of an LGBTI employee not "out" [i.e. his or her sexual orientation is unknown to the colleagues, editor's remark] at the workplace is about 30 per cent. This can be further translated into financial terms. Taking the eight per cent LGBTI community average, one can then calculate actual productivity lost at RBI. Outside, we talk about the economic impact on the market place. Let me illustrate this with the example of the economic impact of same-sex civil partnerships in Austria. In 2017, more than 500 same-sex couples entered into a civil partnership. According to an ING DiBa international survey, the average spent on wedding arrangements in Austria is € 4,700 (which, by the way, is much less than what is spent in Italy or Germany). On top of this sum, we need to add what is spent on food and lodging by non-resident guests. Civil partnerships also have a direct impact on collected taxes and employment in service and hospitality industries. So, one can start to estimate what will be the economic impact in Austria following marriage equality in 2019, and out of that total sum, what share will come to the financial services sector.

## CATHERINE MCGRATH



### Why did you join the LGBTI working group?

I was pleased to be asked to join the group a few months ago. You may wonder why this is important to me, a straight woman with nothing obvious to gain from the group. Well, because we are all responsible for making RBI a great place to work. A diverse and inclusive environment is a critical element of that journey.

We are smarter and make better decisions if all of us feel welcome and appreciated for what we contribute, not judged for our personal lifestyle or choices. While this might be considered a personal perspective, there is academic research that backs this up. On Wall Street, traders were able to set more accurate prices when there was a diverse group instead of a homogeneous one. It has also been proven that scientific research is better when done by a diverse group, and even academic papers written by a diverse group have a higher impact than those from the same ethnic group.

But regardless of the research, I believe that all our colleagues should be judged on the content of their character, not for their lifestyle or gender, color or ethnic origin. Life and work are enriched by diversity and inclusion, not exclusion. We are better people and employees when there is an environment of acceptance. So, I believe it is all of our responsibility to create such an environment. Being part of the LGBTI working group is my way of living up to that responsibility.

## LUDO SWINNEN



### How did you grow into the self-assured gay man you are today?

I still remember the time of growing up in a small Flemish village near Antwerp, little by little discovering I was kind of "different". It was not easy, having no role models, no contact possibilities and nobody to talk about who and what I was. It was really tough, but once at university, I became aware I was not alone in this world. But the coming out was still a bridge too far. When I met my future partner (on the Red Square in Moscow!) he was the missing link in my life and with him my life became full and rich. After moving to Brussels, I outed myself to my parents (not really easy) and friends, and about 20 years ago I started working as an expat, finally arriving at RBI ten years ago, every time outing myself to new friends and colleagues. It has been a long and bumpy road, but I am happy I took it and I am especially happy that for a large part, I was accompanied by my partner, now for over 30 years.

### How can you contribute to improving the status of the LGBTI community in the society you live and work in?

I am a lucky gay man. I have a great job in a great bank. I can be myself in the teams I work with and I do not experience direct or invisible discrimination. But there are still too many people who miss the opportunity of living such a life as coming out is still, even in 2018, a big issue that demands a lot of courage. One thing should be clear: nobody should be forced to come out. Nevertheless it remains important for me to continuously make a statement by being visible in the RBI community and showing that one can come out and this way leave the position of hiding one's real personality, without being afraid to lose career chances. That is why I support the LGBTI working group. Together with other gay and straight colleagues we can send out the message that at RBI you can be yourself, whatever your sexual orientation is. It is a great feeling that encourages others to find the courage to shine as gay men and women.

## ZSOLT FÖLDES



### What is your personal experience being gay and working at RBI?

When I moved to Vienna and started working at RBI at the end of 2012, I was out only to a handful of my closest friends. But half a year later, I started sharing with my colleagues the fact that I am gay. The atmosphere in the team and the relationships I built with my colleagues encouraged me to let them in on this part of my private life. Up to that point, I was actually afraid to open up and share this information about myself. Back then, not even my family knew about me being gay, but somehow after one year of living in Vienna, I managed to build up the courage and came out to my family, which was a very emotional event (my mom started crying and asked me why I kept this a secret for so long), but went very well, all things considered. All in all, my personal experience being gay and working at RBI is a positive one.

### What was the main trigger that made you decide to out yourself at your workplace? And how did it improve your working situation?

Being gay is part of who I am. If a person does not know this about me and assumes that I am straight, then he or she does not really know me at all. This became clear to me after several years of hiding. Looking back, I wish I had taken the step of coming out much earlier. When I decided to out myself at the workplace, it was because I wanted my colleagues to know me better and to have the freedom to express myself or to talk about my interests and personal life without barriers.



# EMBRACE: LGBTI "Get to Know" Breakfast (IDAHOBIT)



# BRich: The Austrian Network of LGBTI ERGs

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13618819/>





# BRich: #2 December 2018





# BRich: #4 May 2019

