

CREATING SAFE SPACES AND WELCOMING ALLIES WITH ERGS



Pride Month gives organizations an opportunity to amplify their LGBTQ+ initiatives and authentically demonstrate their ongoing and daily support for their employees, customers, and broader community. I am the captain of the Pride employee resource group (ERG) at BMC, which has members spanning at least 20 of the 38 countries where we do business. I believe ERGs are a powerful way for companies to walk the talk of fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce.

This is my tenth year at BMC, and in that time, we've had tremendous progress in our [diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\)](#) and [corporate social responsibility \(CSR\)](#) awareness and initiatives. Where we are now is a big change from my early days. On my first day, I walked into the office as a very homophobic joke was being told. I'd just moved for the job, and I really did wonder what I had gotten into.

I was here a solid year before I told my fellow employees that I was gay, and I do not think I met another openly gay person for two or three years. It was hard to go into an environment where I felt I couldn't be truthful about what I did on the weekend, or with whom.

[Studies have shown](#) that people who can't be authentic at work don't perform as productively. And companies lose out on the individuals who can't be themselves. If you're hiding who you are, and feel like you can't be yourself, you're not going to give what you can to work because you're always using some of your brain power and some of your physical ability to mentally rein yourself in.

Changing for the better

It's been amazing that in the years since that startling first day, I have seen the company transform. It's been great for my confidence here at BMC to be my authentic and true self—and be recognized and accepted. I'm also thrilled that we went from being in the forties on the Human Rights Campaign's [Corporate Equality Index](#) to 95 on the last score. I'd love for us to get to 100.

Part of that growth has come from expanding the diversity of our workforce and beginning discussions with LGBTQ+ recruiters like [myGwork](#), which was launched by a former BMC employee. BMC has also evolved and grown its benefit offerings to be more inclusive. I'm proud that I helped change the company's family leave coverage language when my husband and I had our daughter.

While adoption, domestic partner, and same-sex spouse benefits were in place, the family leave policy only covered you if you or your spouse were having a baby or adopting a baby. There was no option for surrogacy. So when HR told me verbally that I was absolutely included, the way it was written meant I was left out. I brought it to their attention, and they rewrote the policy to more broadly to say that if you are in any way having a child, you are covered for family leave.

The Pride ERG

Our expanding DEI focus also helped facilitate the creation of [10 ERGs](#) spanning a range of diverse groups. The BMC Pride ERG has become a safe space for LGBTQ+ employees, allies, and their families to come together outside of their day-to-day lives, and sometimes, even their personal environment, where they might not be able to be themselves.

In our ERG, everyone is welcome to share their joy or sadness and just know that there is a group that wants to listen and be helpful. One of our former BMC employees received so much support and encouragement from the group that they are starting their gender transition. This was not something they would have previously disclosed in public, much less at work, and they felt more comfortable sharing it with us first.

We've had allies come in who just joined because they want to learn how to be better people to the LGBTQ+ community. We've also had parents who represent their children in the community attend meetings for advice on how to do that. The group has grown to be one of my joys at the company. It's one of the reasons that I continue to love what I do. I love to meet with all of our people every month and just have that little connection point, so we don't feel alone.

Now, when an employee comes on board at BMC, they immediately learn about the ERGs and feel connected. It doesn't take them two years to find a member of their community here. That's an amazing thing. And while we hear a lot now about younger generation, first-time professionals looking for organizations that are more diverse and inclusive, our ERG has actually attracted middle-aged and mid-career workers who may have previously felt shut off but are now empowered to participate and be their true selves.

The ERG is also an important haven amid the sociopolitical changes impacting regions where some of our employees live and work. It's a safety net, and I hope we can soon allow employees to participate anonymously in our ERG, if they so choose. I want more of those individuals who feel they can't be themselves outside of BMC to at least feel they can be themselves inside of BMC.

Make a difference

People often think they don't know anyone who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community, but someone you know definitely is, whether in passing or in close connection. Think of them when you support the community, during Pride, and throughout the year as an ally and champion.

If you'd like more information about Pride activities and how you can be an ally, check out the [Human Rights Campaign](#) here in the U.S., and the [Humsafar Trust](#), an organization in India that BMC partners with on LGBTQ+ initiatives. If you'd like to wear your Pride this June, check out our Pride ERG's new publicly available t-shirt [here](#). Wishing you and yours a Happy Pride!