

Prior to Coming Out		Status
<p>1. Develop your own plan. This is important. When I first went to HR, I was expecting the organization to know everything and be ready. You know, I was half expecting the head of HR to press a button on her desk and announce "Okay we have a trans employee. Launch protocol delta-epsilon 6." But, the head of HR was actually expecting me to have a plan. After all, I was the transgender employee and (as far as this office is concerned) the resident expert on all things transgender. So save yourself that awkward step by developing a plan in advance.</p> <p>Your plan should include:</p> <p>Key dates (when you plan to start work as your preferred gender, when you might take leave, when your transition should be communicated to the organization).</p> <p>Identify point people and key employees who will need to play specific roles in your transition. Legal may need to review the company's HR policies, HR may need communicate with staff and answer staff questions, if you have clients they may need to be notified by a supervisor.</p> <p>Draft a communication plan. Be sure to make your thoughts clear on what language you would like used and how you would like any announcement to be made. You may want to make it clear when you would prefer communication be sent. Would you be more comfortable being there to answer questions, meeting with people one-on-one, or with a company-wide memo?</p> <p>Prepare a list of records that will need to be updated (insurance, email, company IDs, organizational charts, etc.).</p>		
<p>2. If you haven't already, start a personnel file at home. Collect every performance review, every email where your boss says "Great job!" and any other documentation that clearly shows that you're competent at your job. Hopefully you won't need it, but if you find yourself being treated differently for being transgender, you'll want to have a handy-dandy folder ready to show that everyone at work thought you were competent or doing a good job. Of course, if you're not good at your job, I can't help you. Maybe try harder.</p>		
<p>3. Start working on your documentation if you can. Transition may be easier if you've already legally changed your name and gotten your new driver's license and Social Security Card. Some organizations may not want to update your personnel records unless you have legally changed your name.</p>		
<p>4. If you have a cool co-worker, get their support. Coming out in advance (even to one or two people you trust) can help give you an idea of how the rest of your co-workers might react to your transition. Plus sometimes it just helps to have someone you can go grab a coffee with or hit happy hour with to vent frustrations or get advice.</p>		
<p>5. Consider the option of starting a new job as you. If you're already looking to shift to another organization or looking into alternate career paths, it may be a good option. Starting fresh at a new place where no one knows you as your birth-gender may be easier for some people. Even if you think you'd like to stay at your current job, it doesn't hurt to send out feelers or even go on a few interviews to see how things go. Not only will you maybe find a great new job, but interviewing as your true gender may give you a good confidence boost.</p>		
<p>6. Update your resume. This is something you should do routinely as it can be helpful in a number of ways. If you end up needing to jump ship, you want to be ready. Plus, having your resume on hand when meeting with your supervisor can be a helpful way to show your value to the organization.</p>		
<p>7. Wow, based on the above, it looks like you've been doing a lot of prep. Maybe take a break from work transition planning and grab a pint or a coffee or some candy (whatever works for you) and relax. You can do this!</p>		

Coming Out		
1. Be courageous. It's normal to be terrified. In fact, in certain situations it would be abnormal to be calm and collected. Remember that the greatest moments of your life are going to be those times when you overcame your fears. You can do this!	Be courageous! You can do this!!	
2. Start with a simple conversation. Depending on your workplace structure, the initial communication may be with your supervisor or it may be with Human Resources. This might be an email you send or it might be in a quick face-to-face meeting. For me, it started by making a quick appointment with the head of HR. I preferred to have the actual conversation in person. Personally, I think face-to-face is a better option. Unless your organization eschews face-to-face meetings for some reason or you'd be more comfortable documenting every single step, I would say be courageous and actually talk to someone. Sure, it's a heck of a lot easier to send a drunken email at 3am, but c'mon, you're about to come out to everyone. It's time to screw up your courage and have that first conversation, rather than sending an email.		
3. Be professional and courteous. Don't start the conversation by talking about your legal rights, or what the employee handbook says, or that loophole you found in the dress code policy that doesn't specifically exclude men from wearing skirts. This is a time to be polite and listen. You're about to bring a big change to the organization and you're about to give a few people like Legal and HR a lot of work. Your employer has to figure out how to respect your rights, but they are also going to be thinking about how they're going to deal with the rest of the people in the company and their clients. Yes, this is your transition, but this isn't going to be all about you.		
4. Now, that doesn't mean you have to shut up and go along with whatever the employer wants. Empower yourself to speak up about things that might make you uncomfortable. My place of employment wanted me to lead a Q&A session for staff. I spoke up and said that would make me uncomfortable and that I didn't want to be the center of attention. They also wanted to have a "welcoming breakfast" for staff and I spoke up to nix that too as I wanted my transition to happen with as little fanfare as possible. I was polite as I pointed out specifically why while those might seem like good ideas on the surface, in both cases they do make the transition seem sort of like a big spectacle. Now, you may want a big spectacle, but you've got to speak up about that too. If you disagree with something, carefully explain your reasons why and always offer an alternative.		
5. Listen and be open to working with your employer. This is collaboration, a project that you and your organization will be undertaking. Accept that your employer may be sympathetic and supportive, but also have no real idea how transition should work. They may be expecting you to take the lead or to have a plan developed. This is where having a plan prepared comes in handy. Chances are your employer has no idea what specific steps to take, so if you present a fully formed plan then that puts you in control. Even better than that, it puts you in control and makes you look really helpful. Double bonus!		
6. Take some time off before you start work as your shiny new gender. This will give everyone a little time to process the news and will allow you to step back so you're not bombarded with questions or unwanted attention. Some people choose this time for surgery if that's part of their plan, but for me I just took three extra days off and a got a manicure and my hair styled. Do whatever works for you, but some breathing room before the change will be super helpful.		
7. Take lots and lots of time planning out the perfect first day outfit. That's what I did. Okay, maybe that's just me.		

Starting Work		
1. Dress professionally. Take some time to look at what your co-workers are wearing. Not a ton of time. Don't stare obviously. But take note of your workplace's clothing culture. What are other people wearing on a day to day basis? How dressy are they? You might find it good to dress up one slight level dressier than the standard, just to start. It's always better to air on the side of more dressed up. You want people to take you seriously so avoid any clothing that's too wacky, too sexy, too slutty or too casual. Some people suggest starting out in more androgynous clothing if that makes you more comfortable, but for my own transition I felt more comfortable and passable in more stereotypical feminine articles. Do what works for you, but dress up, be professional and look like you're taking this seriously.		
2. At work be your regular professional self. Or if you're not generally professional, maybe it's time to give that a try. Do your best, be helpful and take your transition and gender seriously. Sure, you're going to be elated to finally be you in the office! But while that is a cause for celebration, don't let the celebration distract you from your work. Now is the time to show how responsible you are and to demonstrate your value to the organization.		
3. Give people the benefit of the doubt. It's really easy to assume that people aren't going to accept you, that they'll mock you or preach to you to lose respect for you. That's a totally normal fear. But don't let that fear influence how you live your life or how you treat to people. It's like John Green said "Imagine others complexly." It's a great truth and one I try (though often fail) to incorporate into my daily life. I thought the religious people with Jesus and Mary pictures on their cubicles would despise me for being a sinful weirdo. I thought that blue collar type guys would look down on me for being a girly faggot. I thought that the women would see me as an interloper, a colonizer, or worse a pervert. But, it turned out much differently in reality. Everyone was accepting and super nice, even the blue collar guys.		
4. My experience is, unfortunately, not universal. I know people who have been demoted, been put into scheduling purgatory or had their workplace become hostile to drive them out. While your workplace transition will probably go well, if there are any issues document them. Put them in a written log (date, time, what happened, who was involved) and keep it. If there are labor laws in your state that protect you, familiarize yourself with them. Know your rights and work with your employer to the degree you can. And if it gets to that point, document everything, as much as you can. Keep copies at home or on the cloud. If it gets really bad, start looking for other jobs immediately. You don't have to take one, but having another option can be important.		
5. Know that a lawsuit probably isn't going to work. They're expensive. They take years and years. They will drain your soul. But, don't be afraid to talk to legal counsel if you think you need to.		
6. Keep going. Don't give up. Believe in yourself. You're strong and you're brave. I know it's cliché but it's also true.		
Even if everything goes really well at work, accept that you are going to have extra stress. This is a big change. This is a huge change. For me it was probably the biggest change I'd made in my life since going off to college or moving to New York City from the suburbs. As strong as you are, your brain can only physically handle so much before it just stops functioning. Take breaks. Take breathers. Allow yourself to process the change and give yourself time to adjust. Do what you need to do to calm down, de-stress yourself and relax. And remember how awesome you are for having the courage to come out. Remember how awesome it is to be the real you!		