WHY IS S/HE DOING THIS TO US?

An Employer's Handbook

Information for Employers Dealing with an Employee Involved in a Gender Transition

PURPOSE

This handbook has been created at the request of business leaders and upper-level management personnel of several corporations. It was designed to address the most common issues that arise when an employee makes a gender transition on the job.

This handbook has two major sections:

Section one, ***Overview***, provides background information.

Section two, ***Expectations***, provides insight into the issues and reactions that this transition are most likely to raise within your organization.

This handbook was **approved**
by the Employment Law Committee of the
First International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy,
held August 26 - 30, 1992, in Houston Texas

DISCLAIMER:

The material in this book is a compilation of the positive experiences and successful outcomes of many people and corporations across North America, when dealing with these issues.

However, because of the vagaries of human nature, there is no assurance that all persons involved in these processes will react or respond according to any particular dictate or plan. Therefore, neither IFGE, nor any of its associated organizations, nor the author of this book, can be held responsible for the success or failure of any of the information it contains.

SECTION ONE
OVERVIEW

Just what is it that we are dealing with here? What is my employee trying to do?

You have been approached by an employee who values their working relationship with your company, and who understands the investment that you have made in their training, morale, and welfare. This employee has been carrying a personal burden of shame, guilt, and paranoia for a lifetime, trying to hide a condition that the world generally seemed to define as perverse. Now, your employee is asking permission to come out of hiding so that the personal energy and effort which have been devoted to that hiding can be put to more productive uses within your corporation.

It is critical to understand that your employee has no desire to harm you or your other employees, your business or your business relationships in any way or manner. Your employee would absolutely prefer that the changes s/he is making to be totally transparent (non-observable) to you and to your other employees, customers, and visitors.

In some cases, your employee will continue to struggle with these issues from within a life-long perspective of fear of anticipated reprisal and punishment for the changes being attempted. And your employee would hope that you realize that it is only their body and their social relationships that are changing, not their sexual orientation or behavior, not their talents or their ability to contribute in a positive manner to your enterprise.

Why is it necessary for them to change their gender?

Unfortunately, there is no one easy answer to this question.

Many scientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, and other humanity-researchers have studied the differences between the genders for many years. The only definitive conclusion that has been reached is that most people can be classified, at birth, into one of two groups, according to observable genitalia.

But the notion that all other human personality traits, foibles, biases, and viewpoints are also related to observable genitalia is folly of the highest order. "I am not my genitalia", proclaims one notable speaker on these issues. And audience members reply that neither are they their skin color, their eye shapes, nor their missing or mal-formed limbs. As we approach the end of the twentieth century, we are seeing an emotional ground swell for people to be judged by their talents and their contributions, if not by their potential, but not by the vagaries of proscriptive gender or appearance.

But aren't men and women really the same, except for specific contributions to the reproductive process?

It is interesting that even though most men and women readily acknowledge they see the world differently than the "other" gender sees the world, the psychiatric and medical communities have, so far, decreed that there is only one "right" model for human behavior (although Freud, Jung, and others have disagreed on the specifics of that one model, and Freud acknowledged that he never really understood women).

Medical science does readily agree that during the first six to eight weeks of fetal development, the fetus has no discernible gender. Gender differentiation begins after that time, generally based on certain chromosome pairs. But no system is perfect; one in 20,000 male births are genetically XX (female)-chromosome. By the time of the 1992 Winter Olympics, enough XY (male)-chromosome women had been identified that chromosome tests were ruled no longer valid in the determination of gender. And gender differentiation may not ever occur; a small number of babies are born each year with both sets of fully-functional genitalia (hermaphrodites).

Despite these realities, our society still insists that expected/anticipated personal, social and business behavior patterns are to be absolutely linked to visible gender, i.e., to observable genitalia. For a small percentage of people, however, the gap between natural, "innate" personality traits and socially expected personality traits is too great to bridge. At some point early in life, these people realize that their natural/innate personality, their outlook, biases, etc., are far more similar to those of people of the opposite physical gender. Compilation of many people's experiences has shown that despite years of struggling, hiding, prayer, therapy and other attempts to reconcile these differences, no process or compromise has provided relief.

The decision to change those visible gender-clues and to create congruency between personality and body therefore becomes the only option. Said simply, it becomes easier to change the physical body, or at least the socially perceived gender, than it would be to continue to struggle with, and to hide the socially/gender-inappropriate behaviors and personality traits.

With all of the discoveries about how the sub-conscious mind functions, can't they be "de-programmed", and just change how they think?

No. On the most fundamental level of the sub-conscious mind is genetically determined knowledge. Examples of genetically-determined knowledge include animals born knowing how to walk, and in many cases born knowing how to stalk and to kill. Adult animals don't generally teach their young these skills. The ability of animals to find food is another example of this programming, as are the mating knowledge and rituals of all living creatures. In general, sub-conscious minds are genetically programmed into male and female patterns; that is why men and women see the world differently from each other.

It is not reasonable to believe that women could be taught, "de-programmed" to *always* think just like men, or vice-versa.

There *must* be other influences, other reasons, as well . . .

Certainly! There are a few people who struggle with gender identity issues because of parental influences, such as having been treated as if they were the opposite gender during early development years. Or such as male children having been punished by humiliation, by being forced to dress in girl's clothing. Another influence, for some, is sexuality; some people grow to believe that the best resolution to their own homosexuality issues would be a gender change. For a few other individuals, life's experiences or unresolved desires have resulted in a belief that "the grass is greener", that life's problems would be reduced by changing gender.

But current experience indicates that unless there were also a significant and fundamental, genetically-programmed basis, these other influences will not compel anyone to actually pursue a gender transition.

Aren't these people just mentally ill?

Not as you are suggesting. Any potential symptoms of "mental illness" are the result a lifetime of hiding significant portions of personality, spirit, or soul behind the facade of a phony persona designed to try to please or appease those who would control the lives of others. These symptoms could also be the result of trying to live up to someone else's "shoulds", rather than to the individual's own "cans". And it is resolution of behaviors such as maintaining of separate personas (near multiple personality disorder), such as juggling opposing mental agenda (near schizophrenia), such as hiding away from the world (near agoraphobia), that is being accomplished by the gender transition.

Wouldn't more hormones cure this?

No . . . it has been tried. When extra hormones (testosterone to "born males", estrogens to "born females") are administered, the need to cross-live, cross-gender, is unaffected while other debilitating behaviors and characteristics, such as anxiety, are intensified.

There *must* be some kind of cure for this . . .

Let's address this one from the perspective of the male-to-female transsexual . . .

It is very clear that being born as a woman is not a sickness, not a disease, not a perversion. Over 52% of the people born into the world are female. Being a woman is not a problem and is not something that needs to be "cured".

Besides, if men and women were truly equal, a concept many women have fought to achieve during this century, then this gender transition would not be an issue! If you and I are truly equal, then our individual styles of presentation will not present a problem. Asking for a "cure" for a male-to-female transsexual is acknowledging the second-class status of women; it is saying "Why would anyone in their right mind want to move *down* to womanhood?"

I'm Christian, and I'm certain that proper prayer, or maybe a faith healer, could fix this problem! I know I've heard testimony from people like this who attribute total recovery to their faith in God, to prayer, to a "Born Again" experience.

There are two elements here which must be addressed; each is important within it's own context.

First, gender-transition issues seem to present special challenges to those within the Christian faith. From one perspective, the Christian religion teaches social and family behaviors, values, which are assigned and segregated according to observable genitalia; there are simply different "rules" for women than for men, and the differences are seemingly immutable. From another perspective, however, Christians believe that Jesus taught His followers, verbally and by His actions, not to judge others; refer to stories about the good Samaritan, Mary Magdelan the prostitute, dinner with tax collectors, etc. And it is especially important to remember His teachings that the "unlovable" were not to be persecuted, not to be changed/forced to fit a proscribed lifestyle, and not to be discriminated against.

The second element is more complex. Nearly all people who are born with obviously male genitalia and who are dealing with gender-identity issues, do so, at least initially, on a cyclical basis. That is, they go through periods of time where the need to express the strong feminine side of their personality is overwhelming, and later they go through periods of time where the very idea may be personally abhorrent even to them. There are some very promising research projects into what controls the frequency and the amplitude of these cycles. (There is not enough data at this time to determine if similar cycles exist for the female-to-male individual.)

But anyone claiming to have been cured of transsexuality, or claiming to be able to cure it, is in fact seeing only the bottom half of one of these cycles. It is a certainty that the individual will, within a few months or maybe a few years, cycle back into their feminine personality. It is also common for the individual to cycle higher, farther toward the feminine with each up-swing; and often not falling so far away when the cycle turns down.

An experienced gender-identity counselor will be able to help the individual to plot his/her own cycles, which will become a very valuable therapy tool.

Acknowledging the reality of these cycles makes the claims of those who profess to have been cured, or claim to be able to cure, very suspect indeed!

What about male role models?
A strong male influence would provide a path to overcoming these desires, wouldn't it?

Males who desire to transition gender roles have, in their past, often exhibited an elevated level of macho-male behavior when they were with friends. Male role models were studied, and attempts were made to emulate male behaviors over extended periods of time. The inability of this process to create any realistic or worthwhile changes has led to the decision to begin the transition process.

He doesn't seem effeminate . . .

True. He probably has been exaggerating his learned-male qualities because of his constant fear that his "secret" would be discovered and that he would be punished, ridiculed, and/or humiliated. It will take time and experience for him to overcome his learned behaviors and other people's expectations/observations.

I *thought* she seemed quite masculine . . .

In general, the world around us rewards masculine behaviors and punishes feminine behaviors, regardless of the apparent gender of the individual displaying the behaviors. For the female-to-male transsexual, it is relatively easy to discard the feminine behaviors which are inappropriate, and to utilize the preferred masculine behaviors. This often occurs before any other indications of a gender transition are apparent. It is common within the adaptation and learning process for the individual to become overly masculine for a short period of time.

Does this mean that they are homosexual?

No. As one noted seminar leader says, "When you're transgendered, the whole world is the opposite sex!"

Becoming aware of the enormity of the chasm between gender identity and sexual orientation is critical to your understanding of this issue. The two are related only through current social dictates. Gender-based social interaction happens everyday between all people. Sexual intercourse is a private matter between mutually consenting individuals.

Gender identity is defined by the combination of a person's physical body and their soul/personality. Gender identity is the uncompromising knowledge that most people are born with, that they are male, or female; it is the one, usually unquestioned, certainty of most people's existence.

Sexual orientation is defined by the combination of sexual feelings that a person has and transmits toward another individual, as well as by those sexual feelings and/or attractions that a person enjoys receiving from other people. Orientation is a bi-directional proposition, which is about thoughts, dreams, and desires of a sexual nature.

But the real concern ***must*** be about sexual <u>behavior</u>, not sexual orientation. Sexual *behavior* is about action, about carrying out an actual or attempted seduction or molestation; sexual behavior is about what one person <u>does</u> to another.

Sexuality, or sexual <u>orientation</u> is strictly a private concern for *every* employee unless the employee himself/herself brings it up. Most individuals in gender transition will tend to be asexual; i.e., they will have either greatly reduced, or no particular sexual drive or desire.

SECTION TWO:
EXPECTATIONS

What is Transition?

Extensive experience has shown that gender-role transition is most easily accomplished through a process utilizing androgyny. Androgyny is the simultaneous expression of the male and female facets of one's personality and appearance. Over an extended period of time, the individual adopts increasing levels of the target gender's personality and appearance, while gradually shedding personally-inappropriate pieces of the pre-existing personality and appearance.

In the big picture, the individual must be encouraged to gradually explore as many facets of living in the target gender role as possible, prior to making irreversible physical/bodily changes. Managed properly by a trained therapist or counselor, the use of androgyny allows an individual to separate fantasy from reality about living in the new gender role.

What is the ultimate goal of the transition process?

Transition is a cocoon/chrysalis process. The process itself utilizes time to effect a transformation into a life-freeing new form where the individual can stop emotional groveling and finally spread their wings.

There are two goals within this process. The first goal is for the individual to maintain their own personal support system: their family, friends, and co-worker relationships. The second goal is to allow the individual to discover for themselves the differences between fantasies and realities of life in the target gender. In particular support of this second goal, the transition process must remain open-ended in both directions. If the individual discovers that the reality of the target gender is, for them personally, no better than the gender role of experience, the back door must be open to allow for retreat in every aspect, without punishment.

Above all, the individual must be allowed to move through the transition process at a pace which is comfortable or appropriate for them personally. To dictate end- or completion-dates defeats the objective of exploring the reality of life within the target-gender role. Ideally, the transition changes will be so gradual that they seem to be a normal part of the growing-aging process.

Why couldn't they just go somewhere else to do this?

Experience confirms that there are severe problems obtaining employment during the transition process, so individuals are encouraged to transition within one corporation or steady job situation.

More importantly however, on-the-job transitions provide several major advantages to you, the employer. Keeping the employee saves money that would have to be spent on recruiting and training someone new. Keeping the employee also takes advantage of the employee's long-term knowledge of the job and corporate culture. General experience indicates that an employee who is allowed to transition on the job develops a fierce corporate loyalty and work ethic; they become better workers for you and for your company. The mental energy which has for years been expended on hiding, now becomes more available to perform your job requirements. The major advantage for the employee is having known surroundings for measuring personal change/growth, as well as maintaining a continuous job/work history.

There is another option, within this concept. Experience has shown that corporations and businesses which have multiple offices/locations can often provide an opportunity for a personnel transfer, during which the gender change may occur quickly, enroute to another office/branch of the corporation. This option assumes that the individual has gained enough experience in the target gender to confirm their decision, and that significant work has been done by and toward effecting the necessary changes in appearance and lifestyle. While this process has proven useful in many cases, it is not always viable or available, and it does negate many of the advantages expressed previously.

Is there anything special my company can, or should do to help this transition process?

Experience has proven that a working relationship between the corporate Human Resources manager, department head/manager of the individual's work group, etc., and the individual's primary therapist can prove invaluable to the stability of the transition process. This relationship will help to ensure that everyone is going in the same direction, in agreement with all that is occurring, and that any problems are addressed with first hand knowledge by all those concerned.

How can we be assured that the individual is OK? How can we know if we are doing enough, or too much? How would we know if s/he is on track to a successful transition?

This is another area where a good working relationship between the individual's primary psychotherapist, etc., and your Human Resources personnel, or at least with the individual's manager, will be very beneficial. Any concerns or observations, from the psychotherapist or the corporate viewpoint, can be handled in the most helpful manner through this type of connection.

But (for the male-to-female) s/he still acts so very male in so many respects. We just don't see any female personality traits at all!

This is probably true, for now. She has spent a lifetime becoming acculturated as a male, learning to survive in society by emulating the male-culture patterns of life. Because as a man she lived in constant fear of social ostracizing, she probably over compensated toward male behaviors. And, she has never had any real opportunity to practice, polish, or assimilate her innate feminine personality, to gain feedback from other women. To shed a lifetime of learning-inertia, and to become acculturated as a female, will take some time and effort. This is especially true because our society still rewards male behaviors over female behaviors.

The bigger issue, however, is the memory inertia of co-workers. They have known her as a man, and they do not want to have to change their viewpoint, their perspective; they do not want to change their gender-based relationships. To justify their inability to change, they will continue to seek out any traces of the person they once knew, and to thereby deny that any changes actually took place.

These are also part of the reasoning behind the recommendation for a gradual gender transition.

But (for the female-to-male) he still looks and seems to act like a woman in so many respects. Where's the male?

He has spent a lifetime of forced acculturation into the female role. His emotional survival in society came from emulating the female-culture patterns of life. Now he will spend a period of time in fear of not being able to compete with other men, and in fear from not understanding the personal "testing" that other men will impose on him. And he will likely over-compensate in his display of male behaviors, for a short time. The bigger issue, however, is the memory inertia of co-workers. They have known him as a woman, and they do not want to have to change their viewpoint, their perspective; they do not want to change their gender-based relationships.

To justify co-worker's own inability to change, their own memory-inertia, they will continue to seek out any traces of the person they once knew, and to thereby deny that any changes actually took place.

He is becoming a *She*, and that job is not usually done by a woman...

(alternately) *She* is becoming a *He*, and that job is not usually done by a man...

Many transgendered and transsexual people have worked themselves into intensely stereotypical jobs in their gender of experience, to try to hide their true feelings. This can definitely present a problem, to you and to them.

There are two approaches you can take to this situation. One, if/when the transition process has brought her/him to a point where her/his presence or skills in the "new" gender role are going to be a problem, you may want to arrange a transfer to another department or work area which would be more gender-appropriate for her/him. Or, two, you may have to reach an agreement with her/him that the job description is valid and required, and if s/he cannot or will not perform to the requirements of the job description, s/he will need to seek employment elsewhere.

You need to be aware, however, of the possible legal ramifications of maintaining job descriptions which discriminate on the basis of sex/gender. Some employers have utilized a form of "physical demands analysis" in creating job criteria. These criteria have been used, for example, to keep women out of combat, fire fighting, etc. Are the criteria valid toward the tasks of the job (i.e., can the person move firehoses vs. can the person lift specific dead weights)? These should not be gender-transition issues.

Wouldn't it be easier just to make the changes quickly and be done with it?

No. There are not any managers or co-workers who value sudden changes. Managers need, as much as possible, for the world around them to remain stable, to remain within their personal control. Co-workers in general do not want to have to make sudden changes in their own belief systems or relationships to accommodate anyone else.

I'm not a bit comfortable with this gender transition!

Many people in your position have expressed similar discomfort. Your own personal belief systems are being seriously challenged by this issue. This is an understandable discomfort. It's good you have acknowledged that fact as the true reality of the big-picture situation! Many people who express extreme discomfort with someone who is undergoing *any* type of life-transition are themselves hiding an issue with potentially serious ramifications. You should be aware that the gender issues have the potential to become a "red herring", a smoke screen hiding a personality conflict with the individual.

The real issue is relationship perspective. The easiest way to understand the change in relationship perspective is to remember how it is when someone receives a job promotion to a position over former co-workers. The working relationships will change somewhat, but the overall objectives of the department will remain the same.

It sometimes seems like the individual is really pushing this onto a lot of other people...

The transition process heavily encourages individuals to become active in target-gender-specific groups, such as woman's social/luncheon groups, and women-intensive classes in school for the male-to-female; or sports and hobby groups for the female-to-male. (These are deliberately gender-stereotyped, and deliberately designed to put the individual into situations where maximum real-vs.-fantasy learning, about the target gender, can occur). It is especially valuable to the transition process to have extensive ongoing interactions with people of the target gender, such as those that occur at business/social events. The individual should be heavily encouraged to build new friendships/ relationships with persons of both genders.

Why is he/she doing this to us/me?

Although it may be difficult to understand, s/he is not doing any of this to hurt anyone. S/he is doing this to try to stop a personal emotional pain. This is not about you, it is about them and about their struggle for personal dignity and self-worth. This is their own personal battle to build self-esteem and personal dignity, to learn how to love themselves, so that they may learn to love others and to share with others. You cannot give to anyone from an empty bucket; transsexuals have spent their lives trying to find a way to put something, anything, into their "buckets", to create personal self-esteem.

Taken from another perspective, this question reflects the special bonding or connectedness that women in particular have with others, the affinity of shared emotions. The initial steps of the transition may be accompanied by increased levels of the individual's own anxieties, paranoia, etc., which other women will sense and "share". This, then, is generally the source of the emotions which raise this question/concern.

It seems like they are trying to hide information from all of us. I would like to know more about what they are feeling, how they are doing.
(Alternately) They are really irritating us all with information and stories about what they are going through. Do we really need to be *this* involved?

Their therapist, as a partner in their transition management, should have recommended that they give minimal answers to the very personal questions about their transition. You may need to remind them of this recommendation. You and your other employees do not need to be *that* invested in one person's life. S/he should have been counseled to answer only the specific question that was asked, and not to divulge reams of personal information. S/he should have been advised to ask others not to speculate or spread rumors, but rather to come directly to her/him for information on the transition.

It would be good to remember, also, that one of the typical masculine expectations is to keep information and feelings hidden away from others until they need to know, and that one of the typical feminine expectations is to share every feeling and experience with someone else.

For our businesses planning purposes, when and what will the surgery consist of? What can we expect?

Surgery, when and if it does come, will be no different than any other medical procedure. It will simply be a short interruption in a busily functioning life within the target gender role. It will only be the final result of a lengthy transition process. Surgery is *not* the ultimate goal of the transition process.

Typically, the male-to-female will require a ten day medical leave, with up to ten more days of part-time recuperation/physical therapy time. This recuperation time often can be spent working at home, etc. The female-to-male will require a series of hospital procedures/operations over a year or more, each requiring adequate healing time. In either event, each individual case, each person, will have some unique points.

What are the most common problems we can expect to encounter?

There are several areas which have been shown to be challenging for managers and co-workers/peers. But the greatest of these are issues of restroom facilities, work disruptions, and social adjustments.

How DO we deal with the restroom issue?

This issue should not arise until late in the transition process, when the individual's overall appearance and social/personal presentation have substantially reached that expected of their target gender. Unfortunately, this issue has the potential for being the single most volatile issue of the whole process. While the individual's personal presentation/appearance should determine which facility is appropriate, the reality is that most men won't want "her" in the men's restroom, and most women won't want "him" in the women's restroom.

Experience has provided several successful options to this challenging issue:

1) Request that the transitioning employee use a restroom on a different floor of the building, or make other similar arrangements where the individual is not likely to have to interact, in either of the restrooms, with other employees of your work group or company for a period of time.

2) Depending on the actual layout of the building(s) involved, designate a specific, separate restroom facility for the individual. Existing single-seat facilities could be utilized to fulfill this option.

3) Establish a unisex facility, marked "Restroom", preferably in existing single-seat facilities. (This is not unusual; many gasoline stations have gone to this strategy for customer convenience.)

4) Have the individual identify which specific restroom(s) s/he will be using, and inform co-workers of this plan. This process allows those co-workers who have reservations about sharing "their" restroom, to know how to avoid an uncomfortable situation.

These are **not** long term solutions! As the individual assimilates the remainder of the target-gender role, other employees will become more comfortable with them and the situation will resolve itself.

The bottom line on this issue is to remember that the individual is in there *only* to use the restroom, as you and other employees are.

What other type of work disruptions can we anticipate?

A minor disruption in the work output of other employees will probably occur at the time the major gender shift is generally detected.

The easiest model of expectations here is that of a woman who has just given birth. For the first few days after she returns there is the excitement of everyone wanting to see and to know all about it. Then everyone will fall back into their own routines. Experience has shown that for the first few days after the major gender shift is generally detected, the individual will become the center of attention and attraction within the organization. This fascination will go away very quickly, as everyone re-settles into their own problems and functions.

Will this transition affect the performance of work teams?

Some existing work relationships involving the individual may become very strained and difficult. But this type of problem could occur anyway, regardless of gender issues.

Experience has provided several options for keeping these distractions from becoming a real problem:

1) Develop a specific plan of action in conjunction with the individual, their therapist/counselor, and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representative.

2) Have a "round table" discussion with all members of the individual's work team, so that they can understand what to expect and what is stereotype/conjecture on their part.

3) An announcement from the CEO or other senior corporate/division/department head, to those people under his/her direct influence, of the pending changes. This announcement conveys the support that the individual will receive from the highest levels of the corporation, through the transition period and beyond. These people then pass the message of support to those under *their* direct influence, etc., until *everyone* knows that the individual making the transition has the support of all levels of management. This option is most effective when instituted on a casual basis, rather than from a general or special corporate announcement, and is most effective when done word-of-mouth rather than through written memorandum.

The choice of options here is a function of the individual's job isolation, i.e., whether the individual has much or little interaction with other employees.

Are the social issues, the working relationship issues, really that much of a potential problem?

The greatest ongoing challenges for everyone involved will be the social relationship issues. (The following discussions are deliberately generalized, stereotyped, to convey a sense of overall expectations.)

For the individual transitioning to female, male co-worker's reactions will primarily be sexual in nature. Men will no longer know how to interact socially with the individual. Men's activities will range from veiled taunts and whispers of homosexuality to outright sexual harassment. There will be some cases of personal/friendship separation because of men's fear of "guilt by association". Many of these issues will go away as soon as the men involved have time to see that the individual is still reasonable, rational, and productive. Female co-worker's reactions will be based primarily on fear of latent male sexual behaviors, and even possibly on fear that the individual is only doing this to gain access to women's "sacred spaces" - restrooms and locker rooms. Other female co-worker's concerns will involve how and where to integrate the "new woman" into their existing, "horizontal-based" circles of friendship and camaraderie, their "pecking order". Some women will have, and express, great concerns and anger about the transition; many of these women may be carrying scars from an abusive childhood, rape and/or incest memories, that make them hateful of their own female existence. Watching the transition process will re-kindle powerful memories and emotions of hatred many of these women feel toward themselves. And finally, many women have expressed that the transition to female represents the ultimate compliment to womanhood.

Are the social issues different around a female transitioning to male?

For the female transitioning to male, male co-worker's reactions will primarily be "vertical-based pecking order", how much power could the "new man" carry over them. But there will also likely be sexual issues, that a person who might have once stirred a sexual interest or thought in other men's lives, is now also male. The dynamics of these pseudo-homosexual thoughts can be very stressful. Other issues will also arise, such as can the "new man" be trusted to be "one of the boys" in every aspect; can he be trusted to hold up his end of the deals, without showing emotion/feelings. The "new man" will be severely tested, often under vicious verbal sex-based assault, to gauge his ability to work under pressure. For female co-workers, the primary reactions will be about separation, from two perspectives. One will be in letting the individual change, the other will be in forcing the individual to change, from "one-of-us" to "one-of-them". There will be expressions of petty jealousy and back-stabbing; many women co-workers will feel very personally betrayed.

All of this seems a bit too combative for the efficient operation of my office. I'm not sure the individual is worth it . . .

You should reflect that most of these inter-personal dynamics are always present in any workplace, anyway. But these dynamics may be magnified for a short period of time around the transitioning individual.

The experience of other managers like yourself is that the problems, issues, and reactions described here are very short-lived, and the benefits of retaining your employee greatly outweigh the costs. For example, in many cases, by watching a person make a gender transition, co-workers have learned how to be much more compassionate toward others, especially toward your customers and clients.

It can easily be a win-win situation for everyone involved!

RESOURCE LIST

The International Foundation
for Gender Education (IFGE)
P.O. Box 367
Wayland MA 01778
(617)899-2212

Copyright July 1992
by Dana Cole Associates
All rights reserved. This Handbook may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, by any means electronic or otherwise, without the specific written consent of the author.

Dana Joyce Cole is a Gender Inter-Relationship Specialist, addressing issues of male-female communication & interaction. With nearly twenty years of adult education experience, Dana has conducted seminars, workshops, and training sessions for corporations, universities, and business/work groups around much of the world.
Dana is a published author.