

# Belonging here: How Novartis helped me come out as a transgender woman

Dec 04, 2023

When I was in my late forties, I came to the realization that I was transgender. I signed up with a transgender clinic in Basel and went through a period of counselling. It was not long before I decided that I did not want to live a double life and that the right thing for me to do was to come out as transgender at work.

I had spent my entire career at Novartis, initially as a Manufacturing Quality Assurance professional and then within IT. So I knew the company had an inclusive culture and that I could count on people's empathy and support. Even so, the prospect of coming out to coworkers was a daunting one.

Luckily, I had help from some key figures in the organization. One was the local Head of Diversity and Inclusion, who was fantastic and helped me understand what was required from a practical point of view. She put me in touch with our PRIDE ERG (Employee Resource Group), where I met lots of wonderful people who took me under their wing and helped me see a future beyond my transition. I was also able to connect with other transgender folks within the company. It was lovely to hear them talk about their journeys and to realize that I wasn't the first.

When the time came for me to come out, I chose to do it largely by email, sending a message to 200 or so people across the business and around the world. The replies I received were all hugely positive. Meanwhile, I gathered together the IT team I was managing at the time so I could tell them in person. The response I got was absolutely wonderful. "Yes, Stephe, we saw that coming," was the most common reaction, which I thought was great.



The first time I walked onto campus as Stephe was on the day of the company's first ever global Transgender Awareness Week event. I sat down in the audience to watch and the woman who was then our Global Head of DEI came over and held my hand throughout. It was an enormously positive experience and, to be honest, I've never really looked back.

Not long after coming out, I reached a point in my career where I needed to start looking at different opportunities within Novartis. I had been working in IT for the previous 18 years and I felt as though it was time

for something new. While considering my options, I thought about the journey I had been on within the company. I decided that I wanted to give something back by helping to create an organization where everyone feels able to bring their full selves to work.

I was lucky enough to secure a temporary assignment with a talent engagement team, where I was tasked with looking at how we could improve our recruitment practices for people with disabilities. From there, I was encouraged to apply for a job as Global Head of DEI with responsibility for disability equity – a role that I have been doing to this day.



You may wonder how somebody like me, who does not identify as having a disability and who spent the best part of 50 years living as a privileged white male, is qualified to perform such a role. There are times when I have asked myself the same question! The fact is that people with disabilities, especially people with invisible disabilities, will often have to go through a process of disclosure so that we can make reasonable accommodations for them in the workplace. I see this as analogous to the journey I have been on. In this way, the experiences I have had coming out as a transgender woman help me to understand and empathize with associates who have disabilities.

Ultimately, we want Novartis to be a place where everybody can thrive. We have made excellent progress but there is still work to be done. I feel proud to be part of that mission and to be helping other people feel the same sense of belonging that I enjoy.

---

**Source URL:** <https://prod1.novartis.com/stories/belonging-here-how-novartis-helped-me-come-out-transgender-woman>

#### **List of links present in page**

1. <https://prod1.novartis.com/stories/belonging-here-how-novartis-helped-me-come-out-transgender-woman>
2. <https://prod1.novartis.com/tags/category/people-and-culture>