



GUIDE

# **Equip Frontline Workers to Answer DEI Questions with Confidence**

Scripting to Answer Customer Questions on Gender Pronouns

# The Growing Use of Gender Pronouns in the Workplace

---

## Executive Summary

Encouraging diverse pronoun usage is an important way to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion. The use of different pronouns allows individuals to express their gender identity and offers more inclusive language regarding people's different lifestyles and experiences.

Misgendering, using the incorrect pronouns for a person, can be [an emotionally charged experience](#). Individuals may feel dehumanized, isolated, hurt, or angry. The experience can also cause embarrassment or awkwardness between colleagues. When gender pronouns are openly discussed, the chance of creating a negative experience for people who use diverse pronouns is reduced.

### A Note of Caution

Please note the use of gender pronouns should be optional for all employees. While allowing employees to share their gender identity can be empowering for all and bring important conversations about gender identity to the workplace, some employees may not feel safe expressing their gender identity for a variety of safety reasons. And for those who are uncomfortable using gender pronouns in general, the issue should not be forced.

H. L. "Lou" Himes (they/them/theirs), [a clinical psychologist in New York, explains](#), "Any company nudge to share pronouns has to be, and feel, optional, otherwise what looks like inclusion will manifest as a forced outing or forced closeting."

### Resistance to Diverse Pronouns

Some older people may have a hard time using gender-neutral pronouns or understanding the purpose of displaying pronouns. The use of gender-diverse pronouns has increased rapidly over the years, and language around different LGBTQ+ experiences has shifted. Terms or ideas older people may have grown up with could now be considered offensive or outdated.

[Younger adults are more likely than older adults to say they have heard of people using gender-neutral pronouns](#). According to Pew Research Center, of the percentage of US adults who have heard any amount of information about gender-neutral pronouns, 46% are 65 and older, 54% are 50 to 64, 65% are 30 to 49, and 73% are 18 to 29.

However, the number [US adults who know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns](#) increased from 18% to 26% between 2018 and 2021. This means the use of gender-neutral pronouns is slowly growing, and more people are learning about diverse-gender identities.

It is important to be patient with people who have questions regarding the use of diverse pronouns.

As companies start to embrace diverse-gender pronouns, it is likely frontline employees will encounter questions about the purpose of displaying gender pronouns. Here are various ways for your customer-facing staff to address questions or concerns that may arise about the usage of gender pronouns.

# Potential Questions and Scripting on Gender Pronouns

---

## Customer-Facing Employees May Encounter Questions About the Purpose of Gender Pronouns

### 1. Why are gender pronouns necessary?

Pronouns are words we use to refer to people who are talking (“I,” “you”) or when referring to another person (“she/her,” “they/them”), and [gender pronouns are the way we refer to other’s gender identity](#). Gender identity is internal, and you may not know what a person’s gender identity is by their appearance. Some people may identify as multiple genders, or some may not identify along the binary of male and female at all. Displaying gender pronouns on our employees’ nametags helps to avoid any confusion on how people identify.

### 2. Why does your company promote different gender pronoun usage?

Our company is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion for all of our staff. We have offered employees the opportunity to share their preferred pronouns so that they feel they can be their authentic selves at work.

### 3. “They” isn’t a singular pronoun; it’s not grammatically correct.

[Language changes over time](#) to adapt to society and how we communicate with each other. “They” is now recognized as a grammatically correct singular pronoun. In 2015, the American Dialect Society [recognized the singular “they” for its use as a pronoun](#). In addition, Merriam-Webster and the Oxford dictionary [both include the singular “they.”](#)

### 4. Aren’t gender pronouns only for transgender people?

No, everyone has gender pronouns. Pronouns are the words we use to refer to each other apart from names. Anybody can choose what gender pronouns to use.

### 5. What if I accidentally use the wrong pronouns for someone?

You shouldn’t assume someone’s gender pronouns, and our staff’s nametags include gender pronouns to help avoid confusion. If you accidentally use the wrong pronouns for someone, correct yourself and move on. Think of using someone’s preferred gender pronouns as a common courtesy; it’s meant to be polite and make everyone comfortable.

### 6. Why do you use gender pronouns if you’re not transgender?

Everyone has gender pronouns, not just transgender people. When we all state our gender pronouns openly, it helps to create an inclusive space where everyone feels comfortable expressing their gender identity.

# Gender and Sexual Orientation Terms to Know

---

A portion of the following terms and definitions were pulled from [Seramount's 2023 DEI Glossary](#). For the full list of DEI terms from A to Z, please visit our website.

**Sex** - The biologically based presumption of reproductive capability to determine a person's label of female or male.

**Sexual orientation** - A concept referring to sexual desire for emotional and sexual relationships with others based on their sex/gender; often implies that sexual object choice is an essential inborn characteristic. ([University of Washington](#))

**Gender** - The socially constructed ideas about behavior, actions, and roles a particular sex performs. ([The National Multicultural Institute](#))

**Gender identity** - One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. ([HRC](#))

**Gender expression** - External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine. ([HRC](#))

**Gender pronouns** - A gender-specific pronoun used by an individual.

**Preferred name** - A person's chosen name for themselves, including nicknames, middle names, and different names altogether.

**Cisgender** - A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. ([HRC](#))

**Gender non-conforming** - A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender-nonconforming people do. ([HRC](#))

**Gender nonbinary** - An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Nonbinary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. ([HRC](#))

**Genderqueer** - Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both man and woman, neither man nor woman, or as falling completely outside these categories. ([HRC](#))

**Transgender** - An individual whose gender identity differs from the societal expectations of their physical birth sex. "Transgender" or "trans" does not imply any form of sexual orientation. "Cisgender" is a gender identity in which an individual's self-perception of their gender matches their birth sex. ([The National Multicultural Institute](#))

**LGBTQ+** - An acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and (+) other gender identities and sexualities.