American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

The Reluctant Activist: A Path to Personal Fulfillment

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For 15 years, Donna Rosen, a Senior IT Project Manager, has called herself a “reluctant activist.” In 1998, while living in Phoenix, she had a plan: to transition from male to female, heal from a tumultuous divorce and move to a new place to start a new life. But it quickly became apparent to Donna that her life was taking a much different path, one that American Airlines would help shape long before she began working for the company in 2016.

When Donna began her transgender journey 20 years ago, she searched for best practices to share with her then employer, which didn’t have any. In her research, she came across American’s workplace gender transition guidelines. Donna printed the guidelines and presented them to her company as part of her transition proposal, and it became the foundation for their own internal policy.

“American was more than simply a policy leader in this very new territory,” Donna said. “The company’s willingness to share this information online established a precedent that helped others far beyond the walls of the company.” What Donna realized in that moment was that the transgender community needed all the things that she had sought during her own journey, but had been unable to find: role models, leadership, resources, respect, dignity, education … the list was long.

> "By following my original trajectory, it became clear to me that I was simply trading one closet for another, and that if I could be any of those things for others, then I had a moral obligation to do so. It was what I call one of those ‘character moments,’ where we truly define who [we are] and what our life legacy will be."
> — Donna Rosen, senior project manager, IT

Donna knew she couldn’t live her life trapped by fear of discovery or change her life to fit the comfort levels and expectations of others.

"To live otherwise is to live in fear and in shame," she said. "I lived in that closet for far too long. That's what generations before me had done, so initially that seemed like the most desirable plan. I consider my transgender journey to be a pursuit of self-fulfillment and happiness more than a journey specifically about gender. In that context, it's a much more universally human journey than many seem to want to acknowledge in that my gender is simply the pathway, not the destination itself."

In 2003, Donna was approached by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) — the largest LGBTQ civil rights advocacy group — about serving on their Business Council. The council comprises corporate leaders from around the country and acts as a steering committee for HRC on workplace initiatives. Donna and others were tasked with developing the next decade of policy advancement that would define LGBTQ workplace excellence, specifically around transgender guidelines.

The HRC develops and manages the annual Corporate Equality Index (CEI), a set of questions that measure a company's policies and procedures on items of relevance to LGBTQ employees. This index is widely recognized and respected as a roadmap for LGBTQ workplace excellence. American was the only airline to achieve a perfect score when the CEI launched in 2002, and it has continued to be one of only a handful of corporations to do so every year since.

The corporate world has been a place where the LGBTQ community has made advances during times when the political climate was not always favorable. These victories are critical in the lives of many and represent a true source of PRIDE for Donna and other team members.

"When I think about what my legacy will be, this will be a crowning achievement," Donna said.

Donna Rosen (left) and her son

Donna Rosen (right) and her mom