American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Taking Pride in the journey to authenticity

6/28/2022

Pride Month serves as a time to celebrate the love and diversity that makes our world and airline a better place. Emily Barrow-Sparkman shares her journey to authenticity while educating others along the way.

When Emily Barrow-Sparkman first joined American Airlines in 2015, she was on a journey to finding her authentic self. At that time, she was unsure what the reaction of her friends, family and colleagues would be around sharing her sexual orientation.

Emily grew up with both her parents working at American and knew she wanted to follow their legacy at a young age. Currently a Senior Manager of Customer Relations, Emily started her career in Reservations Planning. Still, she knew she was holding back the best parts of herself, unable to share what made her a great team member at work.

It wasn't until 2016, after Emily and her now wife, Kathryn Barrow-Sparkman, had fallen in love when she officially "came out" to the world. "No one even flinched, which says a lot about the culture at American," Emily said. "I assumed I would be faced with adversity, but it was so much easier than I expected. I felt overwhelmed with support and positivity."

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American, and its company culture, has provided an environment that Emily feels she can be herself, she said. She said that proved invaluable as Emily and Kathryn, who married in October 2019, were ready to start their family.

At first, Emily admitted the couple felt overwhelmed.

"The hardest part about starting a family, especially for LGBTQ couples, is not knowing where to start," she said.

“We had to discuss our options — whether we wanted to adopt or have children of our own in a nontraditional way.”

Through American’s benefits and resources, Emily and Kathryn were assigned to a fertility specialist to support their journey to parenthood.

Emily’s path to authenticity was easier than anticipated, but she understands it’s not that way for everyone. As the Vice President of the Pride Employee Business Resource Group (EBRG) DFW chapter, she hopes to help provide that support. Founded in 1994, Pride is the airline’s first EBRG and advocates for LGBTQ customers and team members around the world. The DFW Pride EBRG travels to various workgroups across the system to educate and spread awareness around being an ally to the LGBTQ community.

“I hope to be a resource and inspire others to be themselves,” Emily said. “Team members may have children who are struggling with who they are and don’t know how to have those difficult conversations — I want them to know they have a space safe.”

Emily has also taken note of the airline’s diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to increase representation throughout customer and team members travel journey. “The education is important. I can get on a plane and see movies that show families that look like mine now,” she said.

Emily found her home at American with the Pride EBRG, but said she feels team members can find a place that fits for all. “It doesn’t matter who you are or where you come from — there is a place for everyone at American.”

Emily takes pride in every step of the journey it took to be able to be herself and hopes the airline and industry will continue to create a welcoming environment for all.

“I’m so fortunate to work for a company that has made diversity a part of who we are,” Emily said. “We have training, strong goals and programs to support an inclusive environment for our team members.”

Emily proudly marches in the Dallas Pride Parade with fellow American Airlines team members earlier this month.

Kathryn and Emily welcomed their daughter in January.

Kathryn and Emily married in October 2019.