

## THE WORK TRANSITION

Hello. My name is April Renee Lauper. I am a post-op transsexual who was lucky enough to keep my job and my position during and after the transition. The company I work for is a large engineering firm here in the Houston area. I have now been with the company for four years...two years each way and I want to explain a few things as to what happened to me as I tried to maintain a job with this firm.

I first informed the company by way of a letter since I was on an overseas assignment in Australia and it took a while before a response was had from the company. In essence the response from the company said...

- 1st...for individuals such as you, it is normally the case where the individual leaves the company and changes professions.
- 2nd...we (the company) recommend that you take a leave of absence and come back to us after everything is complete.

Well, I could not do this due to several reasons:

- I just got a divorce (a requirement necessary to qualify for surgery) to which I had child support payments due.
- I was just starting over. I had NO place to live. NO furniture or bed. NO clothes. And NO money.
- Also in order to qualify for surgery. I had to work (or go to school) to show the doctors that I will be a useful, productive citizen in the gender of choice. This is a requirement of the Benjamin "Standards of Care" which (by my knowledge) all Sex Reassignment Surgeons follow to qualify a candidate for surgery.
- I knew that the road toward surgery would be a expensive one and I needed a good paying job....just like the one I held. You may ask...what expenses, well...there are:
  - Physiologist & psychologist one has to see.
  - Psychological Testing to be done.
  - Endocrinologist which watches closely your blood chemistry and the effects of hormones on it.
  - Voice Therapist so you can fit in better with society.
  - Electrologist to remove un-wanted hair. For a normal beard it would take about 200-300 hours to be removed at \$45 per hour.
  - Drugs...hormones...anti depressants that the candidate may need to take.
  - And finally...Surgery and hospital cost. If done in the states, it will start around the \$12,000 while oversea will cost about 1/2 of that.

Therefore, I decided to fight the company's attempt to make me let me go.

The main culprit behind my troubles was the total the LACK OF KNOWLEDGE or HAVING a working policy by the Company and the

Employee Assistance Program Councilor concerning transsexuals in the workplace. Hopefully both parties have a better education now. I had to be flexible...VERY flexible and so did the company...WHY? Because I was the "FIRST" in the company.

The company decided to "TRY" me only because of three reasons...I believe.

- 1) I am very good at what I do.
- 2) I had a manager who stood behind me 110%.
- 3) The company was afraid to fire me on the bases of being a transsexual. You know...discrimination. But, as we all know here in this room today...if they had fired me because of it. I would have had no recourse...because, for being a transsexual here in this country...one is NOT protected by the law and you can be openly discriminated against.

The company stated a stiff penalty...only one...that of being fired on the spot.... if I didn't do exactly what they said.

- 1) I had to see the EAP councilors and do whatever she said.
- 2) I had to attend meetings concerning me and my future job with the company. If I was late, I would be fired on the spot.
- 3) The company required a legal name change before I could come back to work.
- 4) The company required that my driver's license be changed to reflect the new name.
- 5) The company required that my Social Security be changed to reflect the new name.
- 6) The company stated that I had to work on my voice and try to improve it.

Meantime, I was having a tough time with the EAP Councilor. She knew little or nothing about transsexuality. She was calling professional's all over the country for information and help. From the information she had gathered...I was not the typical transsexual but I have to disagree with her on that point...I was doing what every transsexual really wanted to do and that was to live in the gender of choice and to work in the job they knew the best how to do and would love to continue doing it.

I believe I was the first Transsexual for her in person and I feel she was having a very hard time with it BUT she was trying to learn and to be open about it. The EAP councilor worked very hard and the approach she came up with was agreeable with the company but not always with me...but I never said anything to her about it. I did everything she said and whatever the company said..."without complaining or talking back". I did not want to be tagged...difficult and to give the company probable cause to fire me.

The thing I hated the most was being sent (by the EAP councilor) all over town to see physiologist and psychologist, who she believed knew more about transsexuality than she. She even sent me to the Montrose Clinic (a outreach & counseling service for guy's and lesbians), yet I am not gay. The cost

for these additional doctor's was out of my own pocket. This was on top of the Gender Dysphoria Doctors "I HAD TO SEE" in order to qualify for surgery. The cost of these additional doctors cost was great and the purpose was fertile except that it helped keep my job. In the end, all of the physiologist and psychologist (I did see) told the EAP councilor that the Gender Dysphoria doctor's, I was seeing in Galveston, was very well qualified and capable of handling any problem I may have. The EAP councilor final back off at the end.

Other things that that the company did to try to help my transition at work are:

- 1) Particular care as to which project I would be placed on. The company I worked for is a "PROJECT" based organization where the project team is away from the supervisors. This included location...downtown or Greenway Plaza. Height of partition walls. Locations on the floor to where I would sit. Who I would sit by...etc..and etc...
- 2) Education of the particular task force, colleagues and upper management. The EAP councilor held various meetings with the Human Resource Manager to educate upper management first, then the project team of the particular job I would be working on and finally, my colleagues to which I will be working with.
  - This was to educate everyone as to what a transsexual was, how to deal with them and how the transsexual got to this saturation.
  - Note: Not everyone in the company was told. Even now, rumor abound without number about "APRIL" but not everyone really knows for sure.
- 3) The EAP councilor and the Human Resource Manager then held meetings with me in attendance. First with the management and then with my colleagues/project.
  - Both parties were nervous, cautious but honest with each other. I believe I caused more tension between myself and work by listening to my lawyer. Who informed me to tape everything...fearful that I would lose my job and then I would not have a recourse. This was a bad move by me...it caused allot of mistrust.
- 4) The company changed my name badge and all records within the company. Including the company telephone directory.
- 5) The company stated to me that they could not guarantee protection/shielding from the employees harassment. However, the project Manager laid down the law stating that he did not want to hear anything at all. Stating "that we are all professionals and this was a place of work".
- 6) The EAP councilor and the Human Resource Manager keep in touch with various people on the project to see if I was happy and not hassled. They also was

checking up on my job performances and the ability to do my job.

- 7) The company moved people who were having a hard time with me. (i.e. The transsexual personality.) They did not move me. I know for a fact that they did move a project manager to a different project.

Problems I did encounter:

- 1) Telephone calls at various times during the day, week after week without patterned to which I felt that the COMPANY was checking up on me to see if I was at my desk. Why did I feel that? Well as soon as I picked up these calls...they hung up. Therefore I bought a telephone answering machine...at a time I could least afford it. It was a time of extreme pressure and stress. I could not be at my desk at all times of the day. You know...restrooms or etc...and I needed something to help me.
- 2) Restrooms were another big issue with the company. Even with a court order in my hand, the company did not want me using the same restrooms as the other female employees. I felt that this was the biggest issue with the company. This was solved by letting me use the public restroom on the ground floor. Some 10 floor below the floor I worked on. I told them I would use it but it would take more time away from productive work. They said "no problem".
- 3) The company did performance evaluations on me almost weekly. Evaluating my work, altitude, relations with colleagues and bosses. I felt they were looking very hard to find a way to get rid of me...something technical or whatever.
- 4) The company tested me (without me knowing it at the time when it happened) by:
  - Having me give a presentation on a engineering program to a group of Mexican Engineers. This was shortly after I started the transition...before I had the real confidence I have now about myself...but I did it, even though I was scared to death.
  - The company also asked me to be a group coordinator for the United Way Campaign here at the company. I said yes and I believe this surprised the company. I felt that this was when the company started to back away.
- 5) The company stated concerns about possible bad reactions from the employees and if I would be disruptive to the project team objectives. Looking back now, both I found to be unfounded. I believe that advantage I had working with this company was the fact that all of the employees are highly educated. In other words, they had an open mind.

What I did to help my cause:

- 1) I deliberately had several performance evaluations done on me at my request prior to and during the initial transition to prove to me and the company that I had not changed.
- 2) I was very flexible especially with the EAP councilor and her demands.
- 3) I keep being friendly to everyone I meet. I did not try to hide but I tried to show some pride for whom I was.
- 4) I proved my worth to the company because I found several errors in the mainframe computer program at work and informing my manager of these findings. This proved to the company that I could still do my job and that I would be of value to them.
- 5) I joined the Society of Women Engineers after about 6 months with the company as a female employee.
- 6) I also joined Toastmasters after being a female employee for a year.

To summarize my experiences:

- Acceptance of SELF with work and colleagues.
- Need for knowable EAP Councilors
- Established Policies and Procedures to follow.
- Cooperation between both parties...TS's and corporations
- Honesty / flexibility / commitment

This is what is needed to work and it can work. I am a prime example of it's success.

Well, I thank you for reading this article. Hopefully I gave you some insight and ideas to what I experienced so that something good can happen to the individuals in this transgendered community. Thanks you again.

## INFORMATION CONCERNING MY GENDER SHIFT FROM LARRY TO LAURA SKAER

There is no form of intellectual preparation that can make what I am about to tell you easier. Furthermore, there is no way I can expect you to appreciate all of the implications of what I am telling you. Professionals with the most extensive education, training and experience in this area freely admit they do not know what their patients feel. They only see the indirect evidence of turmoil, confusion and pain that is characteristic of transgender people. I use the word transgender to encompass transsexuals, crossdressers, and transgenderists (those who choose to live in a gender role opposite their genetic sex without undergoing sex re-assignment surgery).

I became aware of my female gender identity sometime around age four or five. I have spent a good part of my life alone, in confusion and pain. Over the last 20 years I have read virtually everything published on the subject; spent time with 7 different psychologists/psychiatrists; and wasted a great deal of creative energy and effort hiding, denying, and trying to purge my female gender identity, to no avail.

What I have discovered is that I am gender dysphoric, in other words, my gender does not align with my genetic sex. I am probably transsexual, but at the present time surgery is not an issue that requires immediate consideration, although I am in the process of beginning to live my life as a woman.

This is not an acquired condition; rather, it is an intrinsic part, a life-long aspect of my being. This is a rare condition to be sure, but well documented. The influences that cause a person to feel this turmoil or conflict between biologically determined sex and their gender (or the manner in which he or she naturally responds) can be characterized as either pre or post-natal.

In cases where both of these influences conspire, the situation becomes very problematic for the individual. Various solutions have been sought to resolve this conflict, but the only one that has been found effective to date is for the person to live in the gender role opposite his or her genetically determined sex.

Usually, the first step toward resolution is psychoanalysis. Unfortunately, this approach has been unsuccessful in alleviating the turmoil and confusion felt by transgender people. For me now, the only remaining viable alternative is to live as a woman with the possibility (if it all) of surgery down the road after at least a year, and probably two, of cross-gender living.

This will be a time of psychological and sociological stress for me, as you can well imagine. I also imagine there will be some sociological stress for some of you. I have no intent to cause feelings of discomfort in anyone, but I hope you find some way to understand that I need to live my life to the fullest.

Over the past three years I have made some excursion into the world of womanhood, and have experimented to some degree with the role. I have never been happier at any time in my life; and I have never felt better about myself as a whole person. I only hope you will understand to the extent possible. Sex is a very rigid barrier for most of us, and to see someone crossing that boundary is disconcerting to say the least. I hope I cause you no undue discomfort and that your sensibilities will not be too severely challenged by the changes I am, and will be making.

If there is anything about me or the issues I have raised and am dealing with that create questions in your mind, please feel free to discuss them with me for whatever input I might have.

Current research indicates the most likely cause for gender dysphoria (the confusion of sex and gender) can be found in hormonal effects determining sexually dependent characteristics of the fetus. In general, developing structures characteristic of male and female are determined by the concentrations of estrogen and testosterone in the mother. In the case of transgender individuals, the basic anatomic features are of one sex while the gender or the structure of the brain is of the opposite sex. Another, more blunt way to describe it would be that gender is in the brain and the soul, whereas sex is between the legs. In most people they are congruent, however, in the case of transgender individuals they are incongruent.

Post-natal influences on development concern the family structure and atmosphere as well as other factors related to gender typing by society. Family influences that are analyzed include the relationship between the transgender individual and the mother and father. For example, many males have a close relationship with their mother, even to the extent of going through an oedipal stage, but the great majority do not develop gender dysphoria. The gender dysphoric individual continues to identify with women and things female long past the oedipal stage.

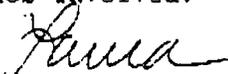
Societal influences include all of the stereotypes defined by our culture. For example, male/female is often compared to hard/soft, aggressive/submissive, artistic/athletic, and the other, very subtle assumptions about the differences between male and female.

There is evidence of transgender individuals in every society and cultural known to human kind, from the beginning of written history. Research and an analysis of other cultures indicate that much of what we call gender is a matter of cultural definition. For example, there are cultures in the South Pacific Islands with dominant females, submissive males and a range of examples between those and what we see in male dominated societies such as our own. In most Native American cultures transgender individuals are considered to have a spiritual gift and are treated with respect as an integral part of their culture.

If you are interested in knowing more I will be happy to discuss this with you, and I can provide you with a list of written resources.

Approximately three years ago, after almost 40 years of hiding and denying and wasting a great deal of creative energy hiding and denying, I finally came to accept that my gender dysphoria is a part of who I am as a person, a part of the reality of my being. I have slowly pursued a course of action to find peace and harmony and comfort with my gender orientation. Many of you have observed these changes and while they may seem to have happened "overnight", believe, me each one has been a small "baby step" after much thought, prayer and analysis.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for caring about me as a person. And, please feel free to talk to me about this whenever you have any questions or just want to discuss the issues involved.

  
L. E. Skaer